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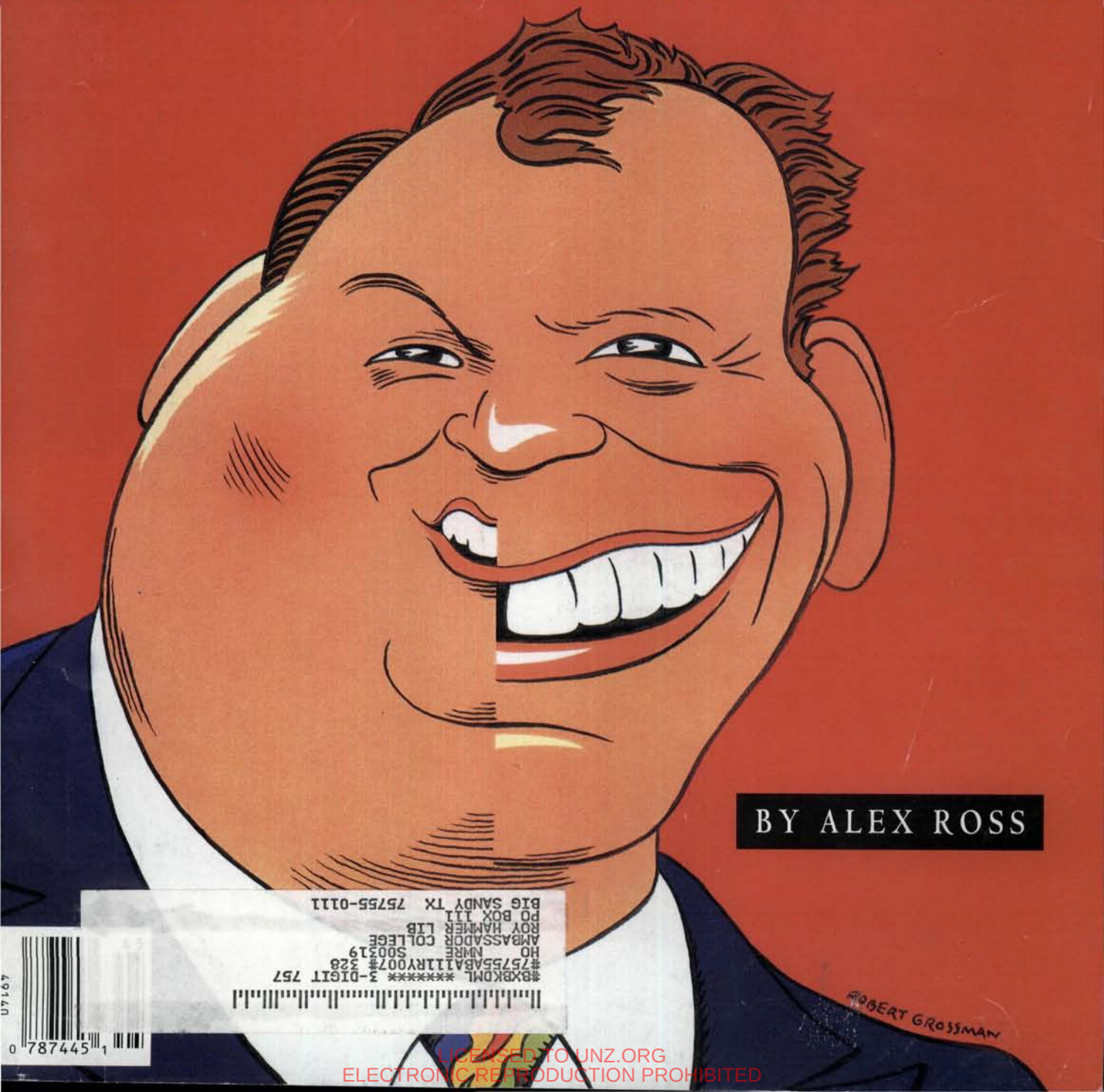
Are RUSH LIMBAUGH *and* DAVID LETTERMAN *the Same Person?*



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A Weekly Journal of Opinion

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CORRESPONDENCE

Habeas Corpse

To the editors:

In "Bad Noose" (October 4), Jeffrey Rosen writes, "Since the Civil War, the writ of habeas corpus has been an unambiguous guarantee that any prisoner can have the constitutionality of his conviction, or his sentence, reviewed in federal court." Either Rosen uses "unambiguous" to mean its opposite, or he must be referring to some other civil war that took place eighty or so years later than our own. There was virtually no such use of the writ until well into this century, in part because until the specific guarantees of the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth and Eighth Amendments were held applicable to the states through the Fourteenth Amendment, state prisoners had precious few constitutional rights to invoke in the first place. But whether they relied on these specific rights or general due process, state prisoners struggled for many decades after the Civil War to get a bit of relief, much less a guarantee, from the federal habeas corpus statute. In 1915, in the famous Leo Frank case, Frank was denied a federal hearing on a claim that his trial was distorted by mob violence because the Court felt he had "adequate corrective process" in the state courts—precisely the kind of argument that the Burger/Rehnquist Court used in *Stone* v. *Powell* in 1976 denying federal hearings to state prisoners making Fourth Amendment claims. It was only in 1923, in *Moore* v. *Dempsey*, that a claim of mob domination was held to require a federal hearing. Things moved slowly through the next few decades, with the key cases only granting habeas hearings where no right of direct appeal was available, and the case coming closest to the guarantee Rosen speaks of (though even it had important exceptions) came in 1953 with *Brown* v. *Allen*, where the Court held the writ available to review constitutional errors at state trials even if those claims could be raised at trial and reviewed on direct appeal. Of course, as the Warren era ended almost three decades later, the Court began the retrenchment Rosen properly decries (though he fails to note that Rehnquist lost in his effort last year in the *Withrow* case to forbid Miranda claims on habeas).

Believe me, since I do death penalty appeals myself, I agree that the decisions Rosen attacks are indeed pernicious and unfair. But it only hurts the credibility of Rosen's side of the debate to act as if its arguments are grounded in scripture or unquestioned history, rather than a messy mix of changing law and politics.

ROBERT WEISBERG
Stanford Law School
Stanford, California

To the editors:

Jeffrey Rosen refers to "underpaid, often wildly incompetent court-appointed lawyers." I submit that, if the wildly incompetent are paid at all, they are overpaid.

MARSHALL E. DEUTSCH
Sudbury, Massachusetts

Jeffrey Rosen replies:

In the sentence to which Robert Weisberg objects, I was referring to the text of the habeas corpus act of 1867, which refers to "*all* cases where *any* person may be restrained of his or her liberty in violation of the Constitution." I was not referring to the Supreme Court's conflicted decisions about its scope. The thesis that Weisberg summarizes was first proposed by Paul Bator in a classic 1963 article; but I'm more convinced by the competing thesis of James Liebman, set out in the *Columbia Law Review* last December. If the adjective "unambiguous" should only be used when all scholars agree, then perhaps "unambiguous" was too strong.

Cynical spin

To the editors:

In his October 4 TRB, "Trading Places," Michael Kinsley takes the congressional Republicans who may vote against NAFTA to task for political opportunism. Fair enough, but in contrast, however, opposition to NAFTA by certain Democrats (referred to in the column as "left wing") is simply briefly mentioned as "mistaken but principled." Much as I am reluctant to inject what might be considered a cynical spin to this opposition by the Democrats, is it not just possible that fear of offending organized labor, a very powerful constituency (and source of campaign funds) of the Democratic Party, might enter into the equation at least a little bit, thus tingeing high-minded principles with some less noble concern over political self-preservation? In fact, had Mr. Kinsley not instructed us otherwise, we might have found the exaggerated statements opposing NAFTA by certain congressional Democrats, such as Senator Donald Riegle, to smack of political opportunism as much as (perish the thought) the Republicans. It

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is always nice to have principles, but the true test is when they conflict, rather than coincide, with political expediency.

BARRY FINK
Huntington, New York

To the editors:
As a blue-collar delivery driver and subscriber to THE NEW REPUBLIC whose route includes a number of closed plants that have moved to Mexico, I must protest your reference to Marcy Kaptur (Notebook, October 18). Toledo has seen a number of plants closed and families devastated as the multinationals have moved their "investments" to Mexico. Kaptur's "deep textual analysis" includes her commitment to people, families and communities. As the slogan goes, first NAFTA then Shafta.

JAMES HARRIS
Sylvania, Ohio

Solid ground

To the editors:
I think Edward Luttwak misinterprets the ground war in the Persian Gulf in his review of Rick Atkinson's *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War* ("Unsung Heroes," October 11). He argues that the plan for the ground war was excessively timid and allowed the bulk of the Iraqi army to escape to Baghdad. I believe his reasoning is incorrect.

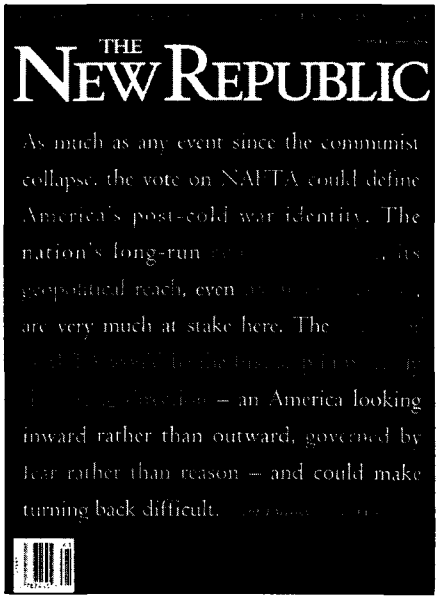
During all the preparations for the ground offensive in the Persian Gulf, the Iraqi plan was clear. It was Saddam Hussein's intent to engage coalition forces and to bleed them—not with the aim of decisive victory but with the intent of splitting the coalition and weakening American resolve to remain in the theater. Understanding this, the coalition plan emerged: engage the enemy in the southeast part of the front with U.S. Marines, British armor and other coalition ground forces, causing the enemy to advance to meet them, then flank the Iraqis with the bulk of the coalition forces about a day later. This would have trapped the Iraqi army substantially in Kuwait and caused it to be destroyed there. The plan by no means "provided for the [Iraqi army's] escape," but would have assured its destruction had the Iraqis executed their battle plan.

What actually happened was that the Iraqi forces were unable to execute their plan because the air war had left them incapable of doing so. The level of strategic paralysis, disruption of logistics and degradation of command and control rendered the Iraqi army capable of doing only one thing: retreating upon initial contact with the coalition forces. There was no way to foresee that the Iraqis had been reduced to this state beforehand (except perhaps by an optimistic reading of the events of the battle of Khafji the week prior). Therefore, it is inaccurate to say that the ground offensive plan was fatally flawed from its outset. It was a good plan; it just didn't survive contact with the enemy, and in particular did not foresee the stunning success of the air campaign, which essentially left the Iraqi army unable to fight.

MITCHELL BURNSIDE CLAPP
Cedar Crest, New Mexico

To the editors:
Europe's first color spectacular was not *Kolberg* (1945), as Edward Luttwak mistakenly states. It was, of course, *Münchhausen* (1943), lavishly produced to celebrate UFA's twenty-fifth anniversary, and intended by Goebbels to be a landmark in the history of film. In spite of dire financial austerity he allocated an enormous budget for its production, and he had Erich Kästner, the anti-Nazi writer, released from detention to write the screenplay.

EMIL SIMIU
Rockville, Maryland


THE
NEW REPUBLIC
As much as any event since the communist
collapse, the vote on NAFTA could define
America's post-cold war identity. The
nation's long-run
are very much at stake here. The
— an America looking
inward rather than outward, governed by
fear rather than reason — and could make
turning back difficult.

Pro active

To the editors:
The second paragraph of your editorial on the Clinton administration's foreign policy ("This Muddled Moment," October 18) read: "There are several questions an interested observer might ask of any new administration setting out in foreign policy: What is its analysis of the state of the world? What are its goals? Is its essential impulse pro-active or passive?"

These are important questions indeed. But one might further pose the questions: What happened to the too-oft neglected word "active"? Is the impulse compelling its abandonment programmatical or anti-grammatical? Is "pro-active" trendy or merely annoying? When did THE NEW REPUBLIC cast aside the prose of Edmund Wilson and Walter Lippmann for the style of the latest handbook for public school superintendents?

A response would benefit those of us seeking to facilitate our co-mutual empowerment through better communication.

DAVID FOLKENFLIK
ROCKY ROSEN
Durham, North Carolina

Offended

To the editors:
Jacob Weisberg wonders why Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell is so offended by the name of Washington's football team (Washington Diarist, October 11). The offensive nature of the team name is apparent to me, though I agree with Weisberg that many other issues are more important. For instance, Weisberg's use of the term "Native American" as a synonym for "American Indian" is deeply offensive to me. Indeed, this usage is an affront to all English-speaking people, especially to the millions of native Americans of European, African and Asian descent.

GOULD B. HAGLER JR.
Atlanta, Georgia

About men

To the editors:
In his defense against the current cult of man-hating in the October 18 "Washington Diarist," Andrew Sullivan states "My colleague Robert Wright (pro-NAFTA, anti-men) joins in the misanthropy...." My dictionary defines "misanthropy" as a scorn or hatred for humanity. Since the evil that Sullivan expounds upon is only directed at one half of the species, might I suggest a more appropriate antonym for "misogyny" that has yet to appear in the dictionary? "Misandrony."

EILEEN O'KEEFFE
New York, New York

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FROM WASHINGTON

War and powers

Bob Dole, of course, is being laughably two-faced when he demands that President Clinton should get prior congressional approval before sending American military forces to Haiti or Bosnia. During all the foreign adventures of the Reagan-Bush years—Grenada, Lebanon, Nicaragua, Panama, others—Republicans were insistent on the president's right to conduct a vigorous foreign policy unmolested by Congress. This culminated in President Bush's claim—untested in the end, but supported by Senate Minority Leader Dole—that he could constitutionally send half a million American troops into battle halfway around the world, in defense of Kuwait, without congressional approval.

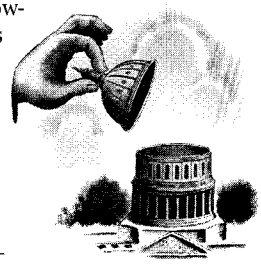
The War Powers Act requires congressional approval within sixty to ninety days *after* a president sends U.S. forces to situations of actual or imminent "hostilities." Republicans have long claimed that this law (enacted over Richard Nixon's veto in 1973) is an unconstitutional infringement on executive power. Yet Dole's proposed legislation on Haiti and Bosnia is a far greater infringement: it would require congressional approval *before* Clinton could send troops at all.

Republican hypocrisy duly noted, though, Clinton's response is still a mistake. He has said he will "strenuously oppose" Dole's and related Republican maneuvers, which he denounces as "attempts to encroach on the president's foreign policy powers." What Clinton should do instead is to embrace Dole's proposal. He should make clear he won't send American troops in harm's way without congressional authority. Then he should ask for it and make his case.

Why? Several good reasons.

First, intellectual consistency. For two decades, Democrats in Congress have been attempting to curtail presidential military freelancing. They have denounced it as illegal and unconstitutional. Why should that change just because a Democrat now sits in the White House? Even though Republicans' alleged principles on this point seem to depend entirely on whose ox is gored, Democrats ought to aspire to a higher standard.

Second, Dole is right this time (about the legal issue, if not about Bosnia and Haiti). The Constitution declares that "Congress shall have power ... to declare war." The flagrant disregard of this provision in recent decades is the biggest scandal in constitutional law. As constitutional scholar John Hart Ely says in his recent book, *War and Responsibility* (Princeton), "The 'original understanding' of the document's framers and ratifiers can be obscure.... In this case, however, it isn't." The framers clearly intended to require prior congressional approval for all military engagements, "declared" or undeclared, except for responses to genuine emergencies like surprise attacks. As Ely argues, nothing in 200 years has made this requirement impractical or obsolete.



The War Powers Act was intended to flesh out this constitutional provision, and to stop the erosion of congressional authority. Presidential flouting of this law is another scandal. Reagan, for example, insisted that there were no "hostilities" going on in Lebanon—even after 241 Marines were blown up in their barracks. Clinton continues this shameful tradition, insisting that there are no "hostilities" in Somalia. He also has joined the presidential tradition of insisting, wrongly, that the War Powers Act is unconstitutional.

In the eternal battle between the branches, forcing Congress to take its war power responsibilities seriously would actually be a victory for the Executive. That is the third reason Clinton should reconsider his opposition to Dole. The central message of Ely's book is that Congress, not the president, has been the beneficiary of this constitutional malpractice. "The legislative surrender was a self-interested one; accountability is pretty frightening stuff." Members of Congress are free to carp, backseat drive and second-guess presidential actions, but they don't need to share the heavy burden of deciding to risk American lives and treasure abroad—or the equally heavy burden of deciding not to.

Any argument that the fact that there are Americans living on the island makes this an "emergency" is even phonier in the case of Haiti than it was in the case of Grenada. Congress can debate the issues, weigh the factors and vote in plenty of time to live with the consequences—one way or another.

A congressional debate and vote would force the American people, as well, to reach a decision and live with the consequences. That's the fourth reason. Let people sort out their own emotions about televised scenes of starving babies one day and mutilated American corpses the next. Let them call in to radio shows and write their members of Congress. But let no one claim that the president sneaked America into war without the people's knowledge or against their will (or, on the other hand, that he cravenly failed to act when American security or compassion required it).

Thus a final consideration: for President Clinton, restoring Congress's war power would be good, self-interested politics. Why on earth should Clinton even want the ability to commit American soldiers abroad without protective cover—for himself, as well as for them? A congressional debate and vote would give him that cover.

To be very cynical for just a tiny moment, it's not as if Clinton's own views on intervention in Haiti or Bosnia—or on intervention in general—are all that clear or strong. Why would he wish to force the country into involvement in these places against the country's will? There are occasions when true conviction may call upon a president to lead (or even possibly to trick) an unwilling nation into war, in the hope that the nation will thank him eventually. But now is surely not one of those occasions.

If Clinton believes that, on balance, it serves America's interests for American soldiers to be involved in Haiti or Bosnia (or with the United Nations any place at all—another presidential option the Republicans wish to foreclose without prior congressional approval), he should lay out the arguments. He might well persuade. No one in American politics is a better salesman. If he doesn't persuade, he's off the hook. American blood and treasure will not have been expended. And if disaster and regret ensue, he will not be to blame. In short the president, and not the Congress, will be able to have it both ways. Isn't that what every politician wants?

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

NOVEMBER 8, 1993

FREE-LUNCH CLINTONISM

Lately, it seems, there's a new Bill Clinton. Unlike the old Bill Clinton, who nearly went into political receivership during the budget battle this summer, the new one has little relish for brinksmanship. The debate over remaking American health care, his advisers say, reflects the new order. Rather than coming up with a perfectly formed plan, then fighting to the death for the details, Clinton will strike a more "presidential" stance and confine himself to painting in broad strokes. Once studio assistants in Congress fill in the brushwork, he will sign his masterpiece amid a chorus of cheers. As David Gergen's presence in the White House reminds us, the upbeat, detached approach worked once, not long ago, for a president named Ronald Reagan. But Clinton should bear in mind that what worked for Reagan politically was a disaster substantively, and that a better politician may be a worse president in the long run.

Criticism of the old Bill Clinton tended to blur issues of salesmanship with those of substance. Clinton's marketing job on behalf of his economic plan was flawed; after a brilliant introductory speech, he largely let his critics set the terms of the debate. But his fault was decidedly not in his putting forth a detailed plan, or in defending the specifics as crucial to its success. Had Clinton not lost to his congressional opponents on the BTU tax, grazing fees and the need for a full $500 billion in deficit reduction, the final bill would have been stronger than the one passed. While we wanted more deficit reduction, Clinton was right on the merits of most of the details even as he had to compromise to reach his larger goal of taming the deficit monster.

The new Bill Clinton is not so forthright. As presented in his September 22 speech to Congress and elaborated around the country thereafter, his health care plan is one that asks no sacrifice from anyone. Every American will be guaranteed a lifetime of health security; quality will be maintained; individuals, businesses and the federal government will all pay less for care. Only drug and insurance companies have been slighted. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, always alert to portents of Reaganomics, instantly detected the return of the rosy scenario. This time, Clinton's numbers are not credible. The president and Hillary Rodham Clinton argue that there is roughly $200 billion a year in fat in our nation's $1 trillion-a-year health care system. That may be. But for the economics of their plan to work as promised, reform would have to cut the full $200 billion without touching any bone. We've heard that somewhere before.

That is not to say that the Clinton plan wouldn't improve upon the status quo in some ways. It would. Its injection of competition into the health care market and enactment of universal coverage are goals we share. But the president is not being truthful with the public about the sacrifices that such a plan entails. Broadening access and maintaining quality of care mean costs will soar. Cutting them as drastically as Clinton wants to will mean some diminution of quality. There is also no way to restrain health care inflation without limiting access to high-technology medicine and curtailing research that tangibly benefits most of us. Other advanced industrial countries have made the decision to face up to this. The subject has even been broached in our own country. In Oregon the state legislature voted in favor of an explicit system of rationing (before it was overruled by the Bush administration). Clinton tells us instead that we can have it all. In answer to questions from the public, the president offers his much-parodied, stock answer. "You're covered." The word "rationing" may be as politically poisonous as "taxes," but uttering both is the beginning of political honesty.

Standing back and leaving the nitty-gritty to Congress also means that unacknowledged trade-offs will grow into greater problems. Under pressure from special-interest groups, the House and the Senate are likely to expand benefits further, reduce costs to business by increasing subsidies, protect the incomes of doctors and hospitals by raising reimbursement rates and do something nice for the threatened insurance and pharmaceutical industries as well. So long as Clinton's attitude is that he will sign any bill that embodies his basic principles—universal coverage, employer mandates and a managed competition system of regional insurance-buying cooperatives—it is likely that he will end up undoing the deficit reduction he worked so hard to achieve earlier this year. The true costs, of course, won't be apparent until after the next election. His advisers soon may find themselves chuckling at how well Reaganism works. But Reaganism, they may recall, is the philosophy of free-lunch government that Clinton was elected to stop. •

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NOTEBOOK

SADDAM AGAIN: News reports in both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* confirm the still ugly truths about Ba'ath Iraq: Saddam Hussein is doing his best to wipe out the indigenous "Marsh Arabs" of Iraq's southern region. Burning villages, cutting off food and medical supplies and draining marshlands, the Iraqi army has sent tens of thousands of Shiite refugees fleeing toward Iran, and has turned a once highly populated expanse of wet, green land into a barren desert. True to its recent form, the United Nations has picked this moment to consider lifting its three-year oil embargo against Iraq. Technically on its way to satisfying U.N. conditions for ending sanctions, the Iraqi government released a list of its arms suppliers and agreed to allow outside surveillance of its military production sites. But this is window dressing. Iraq still hasn't shown its commitment to long-term compliance with the conditions of the U.N. sanctions and by its recent actions proves that it is still the same regime, with the same murderous intentions. If the Clinton administration wants to avoid another U.N.-inspired foreign policy disaster, it should strenuously resist ending sanctions on Iraq until Saddam Hussein is actually out of power.

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BREAKING THE CODE: Last week we worried, as we have before, that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's definition of workplace "harassment"—which includes speech that makes people uncomfortable—forces private employers to do what government should not and legally cannot do to itself, namely, punish offensive speech (see "Reasonable Women" by Jeffrey Rosen, November 1). Now the inevitable has happened. University of Pennsylvania officials seeking to suspend Penn's controversial speech code find that the EEOC's latest proposal may actually *require* the code. Under the commission's proposed guidelines, employers must protect their workers from "verbal or physical conduct that denigrates or shows hostility or aversion toward any individual because of his/her race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age or disability." University lawyers say the guidelines would be a decisive argument against abolishing Penn's speech code. Here's a better idea: abolish the EEOC's speech code.

I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW: The most recent issue of the World Future Society's publication, *The Futurist*, contains "Outlook '94," an eight-page pullout containing the "most thought-provoking" forecasts made by the magazine this year. The medical predictions contain specifics: baldness will become reversible by 2001 and eyeglasses perhaps obsolete by 1997. *The Futurist*'s view of economics and politics is somewhat fuzzier, though. "Workers with many different abilities will have an improved chance of finding employment in the future," the magazine boldly declares. Furthermore, "[f]uture wars are most likely to emerge from four basic causes: regional ethnic conflicts, 'arms and engineers for hire,' regional pariah regimes and focused economic grievances." Editor Edward Cornish explained, "When you try to generalize a little bit it ends up sounding self-evident."

SECOND OPINION:

AMA to Be Neutral on Health Plan

—*Los Angeles Times*, September 30, 1993

Doctors Rebel Over Health Plan In Major Challenge to President

—*The New York Times*, September 30, 1993

STOP THE PRESSES:

Moscow Police Wage War on Crime

—*The New York Times*, October 13, 1993

(Thanks to Evan Barr of Washington, D.C.) •

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CLUJ POSTCARD

UBI CARITAS

By Charles Lane

Life is hard for Ion Suciui. He survives as a taxi driver, weaving his battered Romanian-built Renault through the cobble-stoned streets of this Romanian city. So, six months ago, Suciui deposited 20,000 lei—about $16—in Caritas ("Charity"), a remarkable new savings institution that, true to its name, promised to octuple his money every three months. That's right, octuple. Suciui is now due to collect 1,280,000 lei, enough to buy a color T.V., a refrigerator or new furniture. Too good to be true? Remember, this is Transylvania, and folks take the inexplicable in stride. "A fortune-teller told me I would be rich," Suciui explains.

The discovery of a formula for spinning lei into gold has transformed Romania into a nation of feverish would-be millionaires. Since April 1992 about a seventh of the population has opened accounts with Caritas, and the numbers are growing. The country's independent newspapers, academics and opposition politicians have all taken a crack at explaining that Caritas is a pyramid scheme whose collapse is an arithmetic certainty. *Romania libera* reported that a single investment of 1 million lei, deposited in August 1993 and rolled over every three months for two years would return an absurd 52 billion lei—more than the entire country's liquid assets. But investors like Ion Suciui have a different math in mind. With the average monthly wage hovering near $60, inflation running at 300 percent and banks offering just 70 percent interest, what have you really got to lose?

Whole villages have pooled their savings and sent them to Caritas, bundled up in handkerchiefs. Cluj, known as Klausenburg in Hapsburg days, has been reborn as a boomtown lined with shops specializing in gold, auto parts and stereos. Many residents spurn low-wage work. Outside the converted Socialist-era factory that serves as Caritas's branch office in the Cluj suburb of Baci, a medieval fairground takes shape each day as throngs wait to get in. Vendors hawk soft drinks. Romanian Orthodox monks and nuns, draped in black, appeal for donations to build monasteries. Sickly sweet smoke from burning garbage wafts through the air, but the crowds don't seem to mind. The latest wave of depositors includes some from Hungary and Ukraine. "Everyone is doing this, so we came," says Galben, a 50-year-old miner's wife who rode thirty hours by train and bus from the town of Bodosani in Moldavia. "We want the money to repair our house. We built it with our own hands."

Inside this unlikely financial center, I met Ioan Stoica, the secretive genius behind Caritas. To the poor of Transylvania, Stoica is a savior. Caritas is a "mutual-aid game," he tells his clients; by inducing others to join in and get rich, their own greed serves the common good, a message reinforced by the Caritas employee who sits at the exit soliciting "contributions" to charity from new "winners." It was thus incongruous to find that the Transylvanian "Pope," as he is popularly known, is a grizzled, pot-bellied former accountant about whom little is known except that he used to dabble in black-market currency trading—and that many of the most beautiful women in Cluj now seem to work for him. Like everyone else, I wanted to know the secret of his success. Understandably, Stoica wasn't talking. "I'll talk to you for two hours," he sneered, "but the price is $11,000 per minute, and you have to deposit the money in Caritas." Then he showed me the door.

Of course, there's no real mystery to what he does. Stoica pays old depositors with the cash brought in by new ones. He's added a couple of innovations to this standard Ponzi scheme: the high payoff encourages people to reinvest their money rather than cash in after their first three months. Thanks to inflation, the lei he pays back are worth much less than the ones he took in; and he deducts a variety of "taxes" from his investors' winnings. These gimmicks probably explain why Caritas has managed to postpone the day of reckoning so much longer than all the other rackets that have sprung up in post-Communist Eastern Europe, but there's little doubt how this one, too, will end: with the man in charge absconding to a foreign country with the profits.

In fact, there's a distinct whiff of menace surrounding Stoica's operation. The "charities" are mostly controlled by Stoica himself; Caritas minions have spread the rumor that those who don't give will be bumped to the end of the winners' line. Burly young men in jogging suits patrol Caritas branches, roughing up journalists and anyone else who might sow skepticism. Those few critics of Stoica I could find in Cluj refused to be quoted by name. "I'm against Caritas, but I don't dare say so," shuddered one intellectual. "I might be lynched."

Romanians take it for granted that no such racket could flourish without powerful backing. But who? Theories range from Sicilian money-launderers to former members of Nicolae Ceaucescu's dread Securitate. Others believe that President Ion Iliescu, a semi-reconstructed former Communist, is using the "game" to inflate the currency behind the backs of Western creditors. Certainly, Stoica could not operate in Cluj without the help of Cluj's mayor, a Romanian nationalist named Gheorghe Funar, who is trying to Hungarian-bash his way to the presidency. Funar banned the use of Hungarian—spoken by 20 percent of Cluj's residents—on the city's street signs. He has also offended many Hungarians by putting a new plaque on the town's

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imposing equestrian statue of King Matthew Corvinus, a medieval Hungarian hero. "He was a brave man defeated by his own people when he tried to occupy the unconquerable [Romanian] Moldavia," it reads.

Funar's Romanian National Unity Party recently won a mayoral election in the Jiu Valley mining region by promising the miners, best known for their 1990 rampage against student protestors in Bucharest, their own branch office of the game. The circulation of Funar's mouthpiece, *Mesagerul Transilvan*, has skyrocketed to 250,000 per day, thanks to the fact that it is the only paper in which Caritas publishes its daily list of winners. *Mesagerul Transilvan* has blamed criticism of Caritas on the Soros Foundation, established by George Soros, the billionaire philanthropist who, suspiciously in the eyes of Romanian nationalists, is a British Jew who was born in Hungary. Meanwhile, at the former site of Cluj's Soviet war memorial, which was torn down in the 1989 revolution, Funar is using Caritas funds to erect a seventy-five-foot statue of Romanian hero Avram Iancu. The monument, meant to dwarf the statue of King Matthew, glorifies a man who made his name by battling Hungarian nationalist rebels in 1848.

Nationalist exploitation of Caritas poses a problem for Iliescu, who is trying to win access to Western military and economic aid with elections and tentative market-oriented reforms. Blatant nationwide financial chicanery doesn't help his cause. Presumably, Funar wants to milk Caritas for political advantage until Iliescu finally takes the fiscally responsible but unpopular step of shutting it down. Iliescu and his prime minister, Nicolae Vacariou, aren't taking the bait. "I would forbid this activity, which is polluting the social environment," the president said in a recent newspaper interview. "But if Iliescu or Vacariou tried to stop Caritas, there would be a national uproar against them."

Instead it may be Stoica and Funar who are about to discover the downside of mob psychology. In early October Caritas suddenly closed its doors for two days. Stoica successfully passed off the hiatus as a computer glitch, but payouts seemed to slow after Caritas reopened. At a rare press conference designed to reassure the public, Stoica seemed instead to create even more confusion. Caritas can go on and on, he swore in one breath. And anyway, he mused in the next, "it can stop without any harm to anybody." By early November, Stoica said, a staggering 1.1 million depositors are entitled to get paid a minimum of 160,000 lei each. The people of Cluj itself are likely to take their losses quietly; having gotten in on Caritas first, most of them have at least recovered their initial investment. But elsewhere, things could get ugly. The Jiu Valley miners have invested a reported 17 billion lei in the scheme. And they have let it be known that they want their money, or else they're coming to Cluj, axe-handles in hand.

CHARLES LANE writes frequently about international affairs.

The Republicans' immigration war.

NO ENTRY

By Fred Barnes

David Gergen, who has the best political antennae at the White House, had a brainstorm last July during the run-up to the House and Senate votes on President Clinton's budget. He badly wanted to stage a White House event to spotlight Clinton's efforts to reduce illegal immigration. The issue was bubbling, Gergen argued, and Clinton needed to address it. Other senior aides opposed Gergen. They insisted that the White House drumbeat to promote the budget should not be interrupted. But Gergen wouldn't give up and finally persuaded Clinton to hold a news conference on immigration. So on July 27 the president, accompanied by Vice President Al Gore and Attorney General Janet Reno, announced minor measures to cut illegal immigration. "We will make it tougher for illegal aliens to get into our country," he said. Later, political adviser Paul Begala conceded he had been wrong to oppose Gergen. Having Clinton out front on immigration was good politics.

Clinton's inoculation won't last long. The immigration issue is gaining momentum so rapidly that Clinton's proposals—more Border Patrol agents, speedy resolution of political asylum cases—have already been overtaken. Clinton was merely playing catch-up anyway. His budget had initially called for trimming ninety-three agents from the Border Patrol. Then, in early July, an amendment by Republican Representative Duncan Hunter of California to add 600 agents sailed through the House with near-unanimous backing by Republicans. At his immigration event Clinton acted as if the idea of an additional 600 agents was his. "It's certainly plain to anybody with eyes to see that the Border Patrol is drastically understaffed, breathtakingly understaffed," he said.

Republicans are on offense on the immigration issue. Democrats (most, but not all) are hopelessly on defense. Why? Republicans, sensing a political bonanza in economically insecure times, are ready to ride the immigration issue wherever it takes them, even at the expense of their image as an optimistic, inclusionary party. Democrats simply want to avoid being overrun by an electorally explosive issue. As the debate heated up this year, Republicans quickly leapfrogged routine Democratic proposals to toughen border interdiction of illegals. Republican Governor Pete Wilson of California called for the elimination of all education, medical and welfare benefits for illegal aliens, claiming that

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Where We Stand

By Albert Shanker, President
American Federation of Teachers

"Pseudo-education"

> Please inform Mr. Toom about the grading system and instruction methods of THIS country.... I earned a grade of A in my college algebra and trigonometry courses so it makes no sense for me to be doing so poorly in this course. Please straighten this man out.

This note from a student in "business calculus" was part of Andrei Toom's introduction to the customs and ways of American colleges and college students. Toom, a Russian mathematician who had come to live in this country, had a lot to learn. He describes the process in "A Russian Teacher in America" (*Journal of Mathematical Behavior*, v. 12, pages 117-139).

Toom took it for granted that his job was to teach his students to be flexible, independent thinkers who could look at a problem they had not met before and figure out how to deal with it. He was amazed to find that most of them were more interested in his grading scheme—how much their homework and quizzes and tests would count towards their grade and what kinds of problems would be on the final—than in what they'd be learning. In fact, their goal seemed to be to learn as little as possible—as long as the grade was right. "Their first priority," Toom found, "was to get papers that certify that they are competent rather than to develop real competence."

Most of them were more interested in his grading scheme—how much their homework and quizzes and tests would count and what kinds of problems would be on the final—than in what they'd be learning.

This attitude seemed to Toom like an odd perversion of market principles:

> It is the basic principle of the market that everybody tries to get as much as possible and to pay as little as possible. There is nothing wrong with this: When I buy something, I try to save money, and everybody does the same. What is wrong is that some students apply the same rule to learning: They seem to think that they BUY grades and PAY for them by learning. And they try to PAY as little as possible! In other words, some students seem to think that it is a loss whenever they learn something.... After every test I explained correct solutions. Many a student said: "Now I understand." I was glad: The purpose of my teaching was achieved. But some said it with regret, which meant: "This understanding is useless because it came too late to provide me a good grade."

Toom was also surprised to find out that the students' notion of college education as a mere credential was not frowned on by the faculty and administration. Administrators went along with students' demands for good grades. One told Toom a cautionary story about "some students [who] had sued universities for better grades, and won." Teachers who preferred research to teaching went along with this notion, too. Toom talks about mathematicians who, unable to land a "good position"—one in which they could avoid teaching—taught "as mechanically as possible," which encouraged students "to learn as mechanically as possible."

> Some people excuse bad teaching by saying: Since students buy it, it is OK to sell it. But pushers of drugs say the same. It is the responsibility of specialists to do the right things even if laymen cannot discriminate between right and wrong. It is the responsibility of teachers to teach in a way which really develops students' intellect.

Americans are very proud of our country's pre-eminence in the world; we are proud of the fact that, when the Soviet Union fell, its former citizens rushed to adopt our economic and political system. But when Andrei Toom looks at U.S. colleges and universities, he is reminded of the "pseudo-education" in the Soviet Union—of the way credentials took the place of competence—and its disastrous effect on science, the arts and government. We may be nowhere near embracing a phony scientific creed like Lysenkoism or a bankrupt economic creed, but Toom has some sobering observations about where we are:

> Those who learn for grades expect to succeed in their business. TODAY they are right insofar as almost every American who has a degree, however ignorant, can live better than even competent people in much poorer countries around the world.... But this cannot last long in the situation when "competence" and a diploma tautologically mean each other. The advantages enjoyed by Americans are the results of real competence and real efforts of previous generations.... And someday ignorant people with degrees and diplomas may want power according to their papers rather than real competence. We Russians have some experience of this sort.... It is clear to me right now that the winners in the modern world will be those countries which will really teach their students to think and to solve problems. I sincerely wish America to be among these.

A slightly abridged version of Andrei Toom's article will appear in the fall issue of *The American Educator*.

Mr. Shanker's comments appear in this ad under the auspices of the American Federation of Teachers. Reader correspondence is invited. Address your letters to Mr. Shanker at the AFT, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20001. © 1993 by Albert Shanker.

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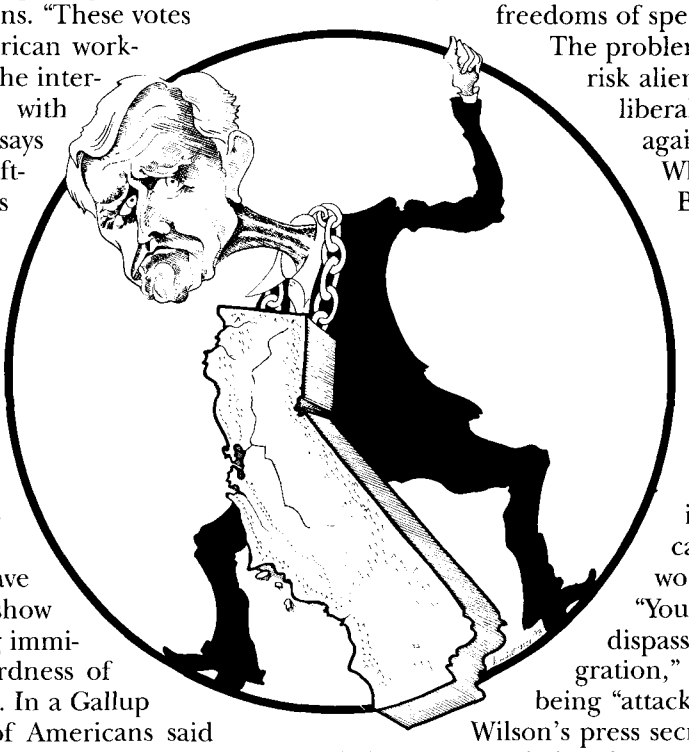
these are a "magnetic lure" to immigrants. He also advocated killing another lure, automatic citizenship for children born here to parents who have come illegally. The result: Wilson experienced his first jump in popularity in more than two years. In a *Los Angeles Times* poll, his approval rose from 30 percent to 37 percent and his disapproval dropped from 59 percent to 45 percent.

The Wilson effect did not go unnoticed, as Republicans sensed a new wedge issue. "This is a defining issue for many Americans because it spells out a difference between the two parties," says Representative Lamar Smith of Texas, chairman of the House GOP's task force on immigration. Smith points to recent House votes in which a majority of Democrats opposed adding more Border Patrol agents and requiring National Service officials to report illegal aliens. "These votes show Republicans put American workers and taxpayers ahead of the interests of illegal aliens, and with Democrats it's the reverse," says Smith. His task force is drafting legislation that mirrors Wilson's proposals. GOP support for tightening immigration comes from both backers (Wilson, Smith) and foes (Hunter, Patrick Buchanan) of the North American Free Trade Agreement. PRO-NAFTA Republicans, in fact, tout the treaty as cutting immigration from Mexico.



Republicans like Smith have been spurred by polls that show growing support for curbing immigration, and by the awkwardness of Democrats around the issue. In a Gallup Poll last July, 76 percent of Americans said immigration should be reduced until the economy improves. In a *Newsweek* poll the same month, 60 percent said immigration is a "bad thing." Last December the Latino National Political Survey found that more than 65 percent of Hispanics believe too many immigrants are entering the country. As charted by Gallup, only 33 percent of Americans in 1965 favored fewer immigrants. That grew to 42 percent in 1977, 49 percent in 1986 and 65 percent last summer.

With these numbers, Republicans aren't stopping at the issue of illegal immigration. There is growing sentiment among them (and among a few Democrats like Senator Harry Reid of Nevada) for slashing legal immigration. For more than a year, conservative intellectuals have been debating this issue, and it's clear that anti-immigration paleocons have routed those neoconservatives defending the benefits of new arrivals. The idea of a moratorium on legal immigration, for example, is now taken seriously by Republicans. "Americans want a time-out on immigration," says Buchanan. Others are not as blunt. A moratorium "may be something we should consider," says Alan Simpson of Wyoming, the deputy Senate Republican leader who authored the 1986 immigration act. Among Democrats, only Reid joined the bandwagon. He wants a ceiling of 300,000 legal immigrants annually, down from 830,000 in 1992. When Democratic proposals like Reid's prompted Buchanan to write that the immigration issue was up for grabs, Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole called the columnist to say Republicans wouldn't let the issue slip away.

The Republicans are emboldened by the discomfort of Democrats. The 1992 Democratic platform treated the issue gingerly: "Democrats support immigration policies that promote fairness, nondiscrimination and family reunification, and that reflect our constitutional freedoms of speech, association and travel." The problem for Democrats is that they risk alienating Hispanic leaders and liberals by taking a strong stand against illegal immigration. When Democratic Senator Barbara Boxer of California urged the National Guard to aid the Border Patrol, she got zinged. A group of liberals announced a "Boxer Rebellion" against her on immigration and other issues. Democrats are also wary of being labeled racist if they favor immigration curbs. Republicans have long since stopped worrying about the charge. "You cannot have an honest and dispassionate discussion of immigration," says Wilson wearily, without being "attacked as a racist." Dan Schnur, Wilson's press secretary, talks proudly of how he countered the charge on an L.A. television show. "You can call us racist," he said. "You call call us bigots. But when you're done calling us names, you tell me how you're going to provide services to the residents of California that we're not able to provide [for] because we're spending the money instead on illegal residents."

Cautious Democrats are dead meat in this climate. Kathleen Brown, the California treasurer and Democratic front-runner for governor against Wilson in 1994, avoided angering any Democrats when she challenged Wilson's immigration plan in a speech on September 29. But she left herself vulnerable to Wilson, who pounced on one paragraph to trumpet the point that Brown doesn't understand the issue. She had said this:

> We live in times when many of our people are scared. They're scared of losing their jobs.... They're scared their children can't get a decent education. And they're scared about their personal safety. Illegal immigration is wrongly seen as a cause.

At a press conference the next day, Wilson agreed

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that folks are afraid of losing their jobs, "which is of course why we are appropriately discussing employer sanctions." He said people are worried about the schools because more than $1.1 billion a year goes for educating illegal aliens. That money could be used to expand Head Start, put a computer on the desk of every fifth-grader in the state, bring 67,000 more 4-year-olds to preschool and pay for 12.5 million hours of tutoring and counseling. And if she thinks illegals don't commit crimes, Wilson went on, "perhaps she should visit the prisons and find that 13 percent of our prison population are in fact illegal immigrants." A week later, Wilson was still savoring his blistering riposte. "I intend to make this a crusade, because we have no choice. I'm going to raise all the hell I can," he said.

Republicans in Congress have adopted Wilson's arguments that government benefits attract illegals and that paying for them starves other programs. Wilson himself didn't call for killing benefits until Washington refused to reimburse California for funds spent on illegals. He personally raised the issue with Clinton in January, then in July. "We got zip," he said. I asked Wilson if there was any evidence that benefits lure immigrants. His answer: "The growth in the spending of the programs." Besides the $1.1 billion for education, $886 million goes for medical care of illegal immigrants, $472 million for welfare, $490 million for corrections. (Money for corrections is hardly a lure, unless you think immigrants come for the joy of being jailed in California.) On barring citizenship for the children of illegal aliens, Wilson contends that the Fourteenth Amendment aimed only to assure citizenship for former slaves.

While Republicans seem unaware of the long-term dangers (not least to their own party) of fomenting nativism with this sort of rhetoric, Democrats have little in the way of a coherent response. At his immigration event in July, Clinton offered a catchy slogan: "We must say 'no' to illegal immigration so we can continue to say 'yes' to legal immigration." The gist was that reducing one would ease pressure to reduce the other. Unfortunately, the arguments against illegal immigrants apply to legals as well. Both compete for jobs with Americans, only there are more legal immigrants so they compete for more jobs. And legal immigrants also soak up government benefits, even if they were drawn here by a job, insists Richard Estrada, associate editorial page editor of the *Dallas Morning News* and an expert on immigration. Invited to Washington by the Heritage Foundation on October 14 to lecture on "Defining a Conservative Immigration Policy," Estrada said immigration is "exacting an adverse impact on the country." Estrada, who is Hispanic, advises Simpson, among others, on immigration.

At a town meeting in Sacramento on October 3, Clinton returned to the immigration issue. He insisted that most immigrants come to the United States for jobs, "not for the social services." Uninvited, Wilson watched on T.V. at home. "I saw it, I heard it, I said, 'bullshit.'" Clinton and Wilson can't both be right. My guess is that Gergen will soon figure Wilson and the GOP have gotten the political upper hand. And Clinton will have another immigration event at the White House.•

The case against U.N. "peacemaking."

PEACEFAKING

By Michael Lind

The debate over whether the United States or the United Nations should control peacemaking operations, and the manner in which they should be carried out, has so far neglected to address a basic question: What exactly *is* peacemaking in the first place?

Unlike its more familiar siblings, peacekeeping and warmaking, peacemaking is new to the lexicon of diplomacy. U.N.-sponsored peacekeeping, we know, consists of unarmed, or lightly armed, blue helmets patrolling demilitarized zones in regions where, thanks to the agreement of all sides, there is a genuine peace to be kept. Between 1948 and 1988 the U.N. embarked on thirteen such missions, all of which adhered to this model. Similarly, we have a pretty good idea from the Korean War and the Gulf war of what constitutes U.N.-sanctioned warmaking. The principles of both strategies are also well-established. In peacekeeping, the U.N. is neutral between the rival sides. In warmaking, it backs the victim or the victims of an aggressor state.

Since the end of the cold war, however, the hybrid term "peacemaking" has seemingly supplanted peacekeeping and warmaking in the U.N. playbook. But unlike peacekeeping and warmaking, which had well-defined guidelines, it is far from clear what principles, if any, guide peacemaking efforts. The term is used by the diplomatic community to refer to both limited multinational operations (such as protecting the delivery of humanitarian relief and enforcing cease-fire agreements) and extensive multinational operations (such as disarming factions in a civil war, policing strife-torn countries and organizing and supervising elections for new governments). To confuse matters further, peacemaking is sometimes referred to by other names: U.N. Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali prefers "peace-enforcement" and "peace-building," while others speak of the new "humanitarian intervention" or "nation-building."

This elasticity makes the term extremely dangerous as a means of articulating policy. Because it is crudely

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applied to a variety of distinct and different situations, it can lead to catastrophic misjudgments. In Bosnia, for example, attempts at peacemaking have mostly conformed to the peacekeeping norm of neutrality (maintaining an embargo on arms to the Bosnian Muslims as well as to the Serbs and the Croats), when a traditional warmaking policy would have made much more sense. In Bosnia, after all, there was more than a civil war; the civil war was sponsored by an external territorial aggressor, Serbia. Thus, peacemaking's neutrality merely served the interests of the Serbs, and gave them complete freedom to rape and pillage at will.

In Somalia, by contrast, the U.N. has followed the peacemaking as warmaking pattern of singling out an aggressor, like Saddam Hussein in Iraq, when traditional peacekeeping would have been more appropriate. When General Mohammed Farah Aideed, the leader of the most powerful Somali clan, violently resisted being disarmed, U.N. authorities, at the insistence of Boutros-Ghali and his envoy, Admiral Jonathan Howe, put a bounty on his head and sent U.S. forces to capture him. The result was the botched retreat we are now witnessing.

In Cambodia the U.N. followed what seemed to be the logical choice—peacemaking as peacekeeping. There was no external aggressor and some internal balance of power in a civil war. But here, the mantra of peacekeeping obscured an exception to every rule: the existence of a genocidal, totalitarian party to the conflict, the Khmer Rouge. In that case, the U.N. needed simply to help the Khmer Rouge's rivals crush it, instead of treating it as a legitimate political faction. (For a parallel, one must imagine that in postwar Germany the Nazi party, led by Doenitz or Speer, had been invited by the U.N. to join the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats in forming a new government.)

With these examples in mind, a good case can be made that the very idea of peacemaking should be abandoned, along with the word. Apart from the fact that Somalia, Bosnia and Haiti have all been the subject of Security Council resolutions and the object of U.N. operations, the crises have very little in common. At a conceptual level, wars of secession and partition (Yugoslavia), civil wars (Somalia and Cambodia) and attempts at democratization of dictatorships (Haiti) belong to completely different categories of conflict. A strategy appropriate for one may not be appropriate for the others. One might as well come up with a single doctrine for dealing with Middle East despots, urban rioters and floods, because the National Guard has been used to respond to each.

It is a potentially deadly mistake, for example, to confuse a war of partition between rival ethnic nations in a crumbling multinational state with a power struggle among members of the same nationality by classifying both under the same rubric, "civil war." Where there is no longer any possibility that rival nations can co-exist under the same government, as in Bosnia, the international community may be justified in helping the weaker parties against their better-armed and more aggressive foes to create a just and durable partition.

This kind of balance-of-power policy, justifiable in civil wars in which the combatants are ethnic nations, would be disastrous in cases where the rivals are factions of the same nationality. In a country like Somalia, the immediate objective must be to allow a balance of power that can stabilize the country. In most cases, this means leaving well alone, except for (perhaps) brief and limited humanitarian aid. In extremis, it might even mean backing the most powerful internal faction. As the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt once remarked of Renaissance tyrants, the entire community can benefit when crime is monopolized by a single municipal criminal (Aideed may end up as president of Somalia yet). Note that in both kinds of civil war, whether an international coalition sides with the weak or the strong, successful involvement depends on taking sides.

If we had ignored the fuzzy logic of peacemaking and stuck to more limited and traditional forms of U.N. activity, it is quite possible that the U.N. and the United States would have developed and pursued strategies quite different from the woeful policies that were actually used in Bosnia and Somalia. The arms embargo on the Muslims would have been lifted long ago, enabling the Bosnians to defend themselves and force the Serbs to the negotiating table. In Somalia a strategy of even-handedness (now, belatedly, adopted by the U.N. under American pressure) would have been the tactic from the beginning, and, if unsuccessful, might have led to a policy of supporting Aideed rather than opposing him.

In Haiti, peacemaking has led to a policy for which there is no precedent in either Somalia or Bosnia—restoring democracy to a country in which a dictatorship is, at the moment, in secure control. Even if this dubious project were likely to succeed, invoking the authority of the U.N. makes the organization—as well as the United States—look hypocritical. Why should the U.N. restore democracy to Haiti, but not to Cuba or China (a member of the Security Council)? Why not demand free elections in Egypt, the home of Boutros-Ghali? Rather than reinforcing the prestige of the United States and the U.N., intervention in Haiti might harm it further, especially if it results in yet another bloody debacle.

President Clinton has already backed away from the expansive idea of U.N. peacemaking that he endorsed during the campaign and allowed Boutros-Ghali to attempt in Somalia. Even so, the administration remains committed to sharing troops and intelligence with the U.N. According to the *Christian Science Monitor*, the still-classified review of American multilateral diplomacy—Presidential Decision Directive 13 and the accompanying Presidential Review Document 13—calls for an ambitious expansion of our role in U.N. efforts, such as a permanent assignment of U.S. troops for U.N. efforts and intelligence sharing.

Despite its appeal to an administration (and Congress) seeking to limit its actual foreign policy engage-

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ments without limiting its rhetorical commitments, peacemaking is *une fausse idée claire.* It is to the diplomacy of the '90s what "low-intensity conflict" was to the Pentagon of the '80s—a term that appears to correspond to a concept, but is in fact so ambiguous as to be devoid of meaning. It is a general formula, imposed by intellectual brute force on a world that confounds generalization, a product of the mentality that sees the world as a unified place, easily policed by a neutral international guard. As President Clinton has found out, such a world exists only in the fevered imagination of Boutros-Ghali and his cohorts. If an excessive popular backlash against international engagement is to be averted, liberal internationalism needs to be rescued from liberal multilateralism—though not, one hopes, by a U.N. team.

MICHAEL LIND is executive editor of *The National Interest.*

A historian's report.

THE HISS DOSSIER

By Maria Schmidt

In February of last year, while conducting research on the Hungarian Secret Police, I came upon a stack of aging documents among the restricted files of the Interior Ministry in Budapest. To my surprise, I found within these papers a series of transcripts that cast significant light on one of the most contentious questions of the cold war: Was Alger Hiss a Communist spy? For years after his conviction on charges of lying to the House Un-American Activities Committee, Hiss's supporters continued to maintain his innocence (and still do), claiming he was framed by the McCarthyites. The Budapest files suggest that they were wrong.

The facts of the Hiss case are well-known. In the summer of 1948 the House Un-American Activities Committee accused Hiss of being a member of the American Communist underground and of espionage. The charges were shocking: Hiss, president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, had long been a senior State Department official. The HUAC's case against him was based on the testimony of Whittaker Chambers, a former member of the American Communist Party who had worked with Hiss in the State Department. Chambers, who had quit the Party after the Stalinist purges of the late 1930s, claimed that he had served as a conduit between Hiss and the Soviet secret service. As evidence, he presented the committee with documents (some of them in Hiss's handwriting) that proved Hiss had committed high treason.

Hiss vigorously denied Chambers's accusations. In a statement to the committee he declared that he had never been a member of the Communist Party or any of its front organizations and that he had never had Communist friends. The committee and the courts found against him. In January 1950 Hiss was found guilty of perjury and sentenced to five years in prison.

As a legal matter, the case against Hiss had been decided. But questions of his guilt and the veracity of Chambers's testimony continued to fuel disputes between the left and the right. Hiss's supporters pointed to inconsistencies in Chambers's testimony, accusing Chambers of offering up Hiss to the committee in order to save himself.

But there now emerges another witness for the prosecution: Noel Havilland Field. Field had worked with Hiss at the State Department during the 1930s; at the same time he was also admittedly spying for the Soviet Union. Fearing he would be called before the HUAC, Field left for Eastern Europe in 1949, where he was soon arrested and imprisoned in Budapest in one of Stalin's purges. Before his release in 1954, Field was questioned in great detail about his work as a spy. In statements to the Hungarian Secret Police, until recently buried in secret files, he described at length his close professional and personal relationship with Alger Hiss.

Like Hiss, Field was a product of the finest schools. He studied political science at Harvard and international law at Boston University. He wrote his doctoral thesis on the League of Nations and disarmament before going to work for the State Department. In his statement to the Hungarian authorities, Field recounts his early life as a spy:

> From 1927 gradually I started to live an illegal life completely separate from my official life.... I managed to overcome my inhibitions and took on the espionage for the Soviet intelligence service.... I prepared references about my colleagues, also obtained and turned over the report written and sent to New York by ... the American ambassador to Moscow.... I also reported on the preparation of the Fleet Conference in London [1935-1936].

During this time, Field reports, Hiss also was working for the Soviets. Although Field didn't know it at the time, both of them reported to the same man, a Hungarian Communist named Joszef Peters. (Chambers testified before the HUAC that he had also reported to Peters, and named Hiss and Field as being under Peters's direction.) Field first discovered that Hiss was working as a spy when, in the fall of 1935, Hiss approached him:

> Hiss ... wanted to recruit me for espionage for the Soviet Union. I did not find the right answer and carelessly told him that I was already working for the Soviet intelligence.... I knew, from what Hiss told me, that he was working for the Soviet secret service.... I drew the conclusion that Chambers was Hiss's upper contact in the secret service, too. Later it became certain, first when in Chambers's flat they found the secret material obtained by Hiss and then when

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Chambers's testimony made it clear that he knew of the conversation between Hiss and myself, when Hiss tried to recruit me into the secret service....

Field's Soviet contact in Washington, Hedda Massing, was furious when Field told her he had blown his cover to Hiss: "I received a stern rebuke from her," he recalls. "She did not know what her boss would say to that, with whom, by the way, I never got acquainted. A little later she told me I had done a greater damage than I would believe and that because of me the whole work had to be reorganized." (Testifying later in the Hiss trial, Massing reported that she was introduced to Hiss at a dinner party at Field's. Massing asked Field to introduce her to Hiss because she wanted to complain to him for trying to tempt Field into his own organization. Of course, she said, she was not truly upset with Hiss, since "we both worked for the same boss.")

Hiss wasn't the only one Field told about his secret life. In fact, he was dangerously talkative about his work and repeatedly revealed himself to others, including several prominent German Communists:

In 1935 I revealed myself to Alger Hiss. In 1942 I told Maria Weiterer and Paul Merker; then, in 1948 in Warsaw [I told] Jo Silva, an Indian journalist, about my secret commission.... I said the same to Paul Berz, too.... In December 1945 I talked to Max Bedacht to clarify my membership.

Field's indiscretions put him at risk. By the mid-1930s, it was widely known that he was a Communist. He was one of the first to be branded publicly by the HUAC. Field became more and more worried about his vulnerability; he moved to Europe to take a job at the League of Nations, but feared (rightly) that he would be extradited to the United States to appear before the committee. "I was often in a panic because they brought me news [in 1935] that I would be accused at the Congress," he recalls in the interviews. His anxiety increased as, one by one, his Soviet contacts betrayed the cause and testified against their former comrades. General Walter Krivitsky, a top Soviet intelligence officer who famously defected in 1937, singled out Field as a spy, as did Massing, who turned against the Soviets at the end of the '30s.

In 1940 Field's Communist activities cost him his job at the League of Nations. Field reports that virtually alone among his friends, Hiss was still willing to help him: "In 1940 I received a telegram from Alger Hiss, my friend in Washington, who was then at a high post in the State Department, that he had recommended me as an assistant to the newly appointed governor of the Philippines." But the job fell through, he says, "due to the opposition of certain circles."

The previous summer, certain it was just a matter of time before he would be exposed by the committee, Field traveled to the United States to seek Hiss's help.

From the press I learned that Krivitzky was hanging around in Washington and I had to be prepared that he might reveal me. Since Hiss, in theory, knew all about me, I could inform him, without much breaching the law of secrecy, that I was in danger.... We agreed that if he got any information about it, he would send me warning, but no such warning ever came.

Field's Soviet contacts had cut him off. He didn't hear a word for four years. Finally, in 1943 he received a visit from an operative in Switzerland.

He asked me whether my earlier political views had remained the same, and if I was willing to work for the Soviet Union again. I gave a positive answer.... He instructed me to break all my party contacts and live like an apolitical man. He also asked me to build good relationships with the employees of the American consulate and other Americans.

This meeting, however, was not followed by any other. The Soviets had become increasingly suspicious of Field. All of Field's former contacts had turned against the Party; naturally, the Soviets were wary of Field, too. And Field didn't help matters. Feeling insecure because of the loss of his Soviet contacts, he told anybody within earshot that he was a Soviet spy. In a letter to her Hungarian comrades, Maria Weiterer would later remark:

In 1943 in Switzerland Noel Field told me how happy he was that at last a Soviet comrade had appeared with whom he had agreed that Noel would get instructions from him. He was deeply depressed when the comrade did not turn up again.

Field's depression turned to panic when, in 1949, Hiss was summoned to appear before the HUAC.

When I learned about the American attack—I think it was on October 17—I became hysteric.... We avoided all contact with Americans, since we were expecting a writ from the HUAC. The door and the telephone were answered only by my wife. I avoided even the surrounding of the consulate. Apart from this I spent all my time reading the public communiques of the committee.... My plan was not to live in a Western European country from where the American authorities could force me back to America. I was afraid that I would be convicted for espionage.

Field reports that he didn't fear merely for himself, but for Hiss also.

I was afraid I might harm others, primarily my friend Alger Hiss, if I returned after the attack of the HUAC. Alger defended himself at the committee with great intelligence; he had been trained as a lawyer and knew all the phrases and tricks. I, on the other hand, had no experience.... I did not trust myself enough to stand in front of my accusers and shout "innocent" in their faces.... I also understood the same from a short letter from Hiss, who obviously could not write openly.

Field decided to move to Eastern Europe and try to find work in Czechoslovakia, East Germany or maybe Poland. In these countries dozens of his friends, comrades and contacts were in important party and governmental posts. He knew people there whom he had met during the war as the head of the Unitarian Service Committee, and whom he had supported financially, so he could expect them to be helpful. He visited his friends one after the other, but discovered he was not welcome.

On May 11, 1949, in Prague, the Soviet and the Hun-

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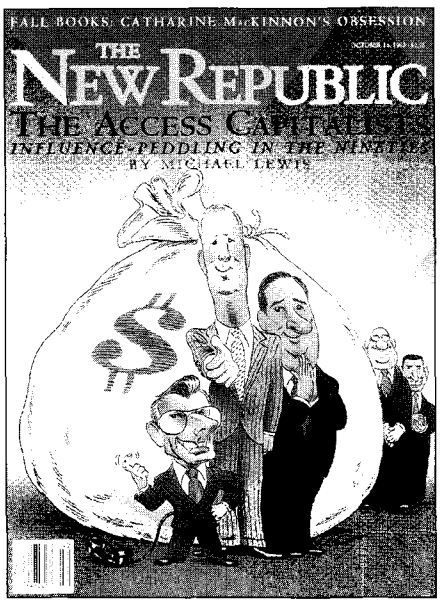

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garian State Security Authorities arrested Field and transported him to Hungary, where he was to become the principal target in one of Stalin's show trials. The operation was carried out by no less than Fiodor Bielkin, head of the Central-Eastern European section of the Soviet State Security, and the deputy head of the Hungarian State Security Authority.

After Field disappeared, his wife, Herta, his brother, Hermann, and his adopted daughter, Erika, also disappeared behind the iron curtain. Hermann was arrested in Warsaw on August 22. Four days later Herta was collared in Prague and transported to Hungary; Erika was caught in East Berlin, convicted by the Soviet military court and sent to Vorkuta prison camp. "Confidential work," it turns out, was a family tradition with the Fields. His mother, wife and sister-in-law all worked for the Russians. The Soviets silenced them all, together with dozens of others who had known Field, because they wanted to get rid of everybody who knew about his secret work.

For five years, Field was held in isolation in a Hungarian prison, without sentence or trial. In an ironic twist, both Field and Hiss were released from prison on the same day, a coincidence that Field remarked he found "disturbing." Field applied for asylum in Hungary, and lived there until his death in 1970 at the age of 60.

In addition to the many references Field makes to Hiss in the Budapest documents, there are copies of letters exchanged between the two men. Just as Hiss had tried to help his friend and comrade when Field had lost his job, Field, after his release from prison, tried to help Hiss in some way. In July 1957 Field wrote a letter to Hiss, offering to compose a public statement declaring that Hiss was not a Communist or a spy. The essence of the letter is as follows:

> I do not know whether a statement from me at this time can do more harm than good, in view of the renewed notoriety surrounding my name. Unless and until I hear from you, I shall maintain silence with regard to the Massing testimony. My suggestion—if you agree—would be to use some suitable occasion ... to make a public statement along the following lines: I wish to state emphatically that the testimony [of Hedda Massing] was perjured from the beginning to the end. No meeting in my apartment between Hedda Massing and Alger Hiss ever took place, nor to the best of my knowledge, anywhere else. The alleged subject matter of the conversation is a pure fabrication.... My definite personal knowledge of the perjured character of this particular bit of evidence is the clearest proof to me—aside of my experience of your personality and outlook—of the falsehood of the rest of the testimony on which you are convicted.

Hiss replied in a handwritten letter, also contained in the archives:

> Dear Noel,
>
> ... It was pleasant to hear from you after so many years and to gather that both you and Herta are well and, despite all you have been through, that you have retained your objectivity and your sympathy for others.
>
> ... I took up with my lawyers your offer to put your statement in affidavit form or to make it public; they feel that it isn't necessary at this present time. I personally find it hard to believe that any sensible person took Mrs. Massing's testimony about me seriously at the time.

The existence of these letters is not new. Field's letter to Hiss has long been held up by Hiss's supporters as evidence that Field knew Hiss was innocent and was offering to correct a wrong. However, in light of Field's admission to the Hungarian authorities that Hiss had indeed tried to recruit him and had spoken about it with Hedda Massing, it is now clear that Field's letter was intended as a ruse, part of the Soviet disinformation campaign on Hiss's behalf. In fact, there are several drafts of Field's letter in the Budapest archive; the Soviets reworked it several times before allowing it to be mailed. This wasn't the first time Field had had his writing "improved" by the Party. When Field gave a political statement as part of his requirements to gain political asylum in Hungary, the minister of the interior appointed a committee to rework the paper until one met with official approval:

> It is the task of the committee appointed by the minister of the interior to study and reconstruct the draft written by Noel Field, according to the following aspects: *1)* The statement has to be more decisive, more concrete, more to the point. *2)* Should condemn the politics of the United States more sharply. *3)* The condemnation of Allan Dulles, who carries on with his dangerous politics, should be supported by sufficient evidence. *4)* The Marxist phraseology, however, should be avoided....

Both Field and Hiss knew very well that their correspondence was read and copied at both ends. Field was under extremely close surveillance. His servants were plants, his telephone was bugged and his mail opened. The political leadership considered Field such an important person that his every move had to be approved by officials of the party and the government.

Inevitably, some Hiss supporters will contend that the documents contained in the Budapest archive are Soviet forgeries, or that Field's statement was coerced. But there is no reason for doubt on either count. Field knew that his testimony to the Hungarians was being reviewed by the State Security Authority. He couldn't claim he or anyone else had worked for the Soviet Union if they had not, since the Russians and the Hungarians easily could have checked up on it.

As for the Soviets fabricating the documents, remember that at the time of Field's confession, the Soviets were conducting a massive public campaign protesting that Hiss was innocent. They had nothing to gain by creating documents that would undermine their effort to keep the truth from getting out. Nearly a half-century later, however, they are no longer around to prevent it.

MARIA SCHMIDT, a historian, is the author of two books on Hungarian Jewish history. This article is adapted from a paper she delivered this month at New York University's Center for European Studies.

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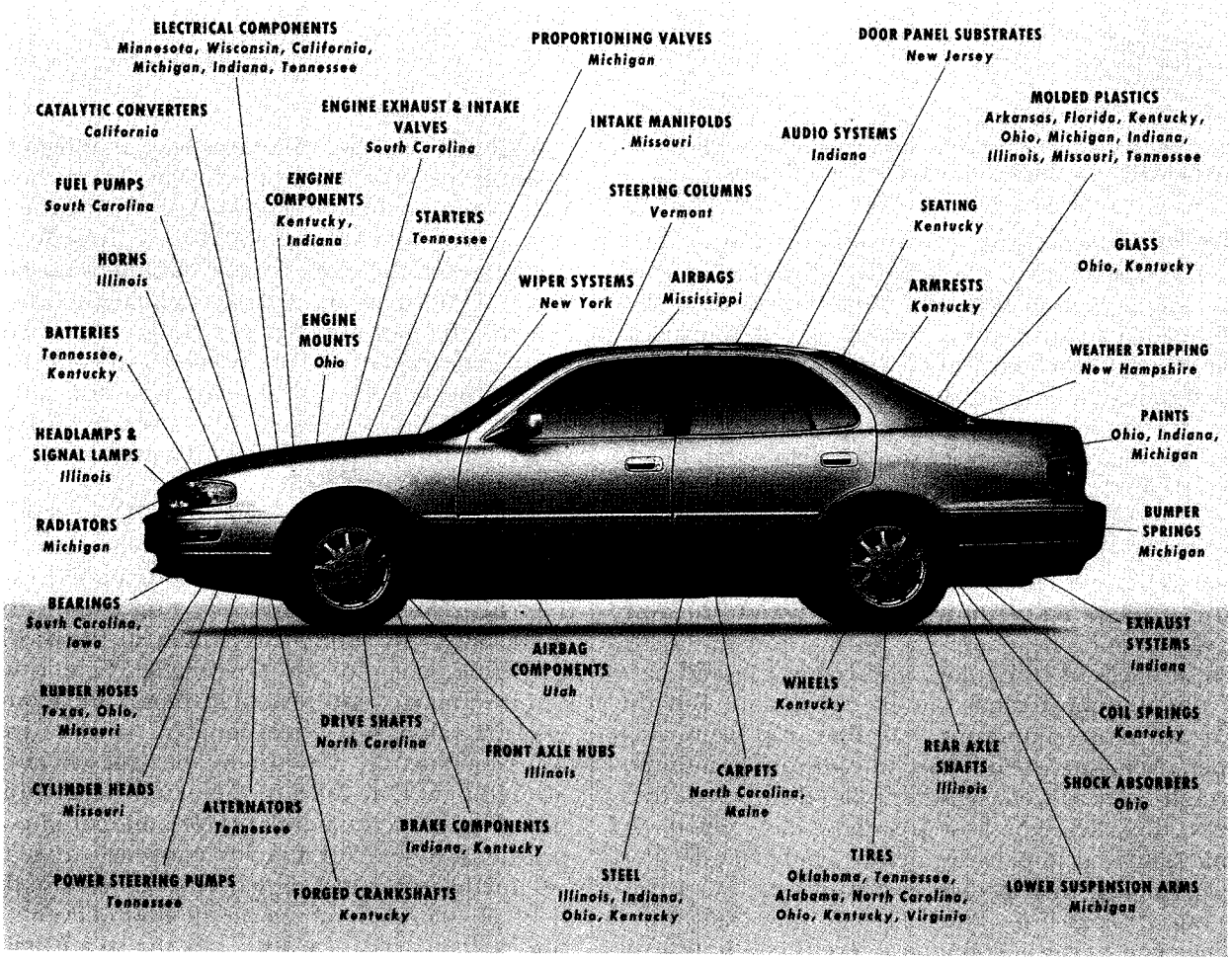

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Limbaugh, Letterman and Bill Clinton.

THE POLITICS OF IRONY

By Alex Ross

> The intellectual human being must choose between irony and radicalism; a third choice is not decently possible.
> —Thomas Mann, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*

Television began with a man sitting at a desk, talking. The desk, at first, was a matter of necessity—early T.V. cameras were massive and immobile, so their subjects needed a visual motive for staying put. Journalists were cast as "anchors," and entertainers as "hosts," each installed at desks or desklike areas. Perhaps there were deeper psycho-historical origins: Roosevelt had ruled the nation from an infirm patrician's seat. In any case, desks have now become indispensable. They impart an executive bearing to the sitters, who make completely spurious note-taking motions when the camera cuts away to a commercial. Anyone on television capable of taking notes has an edge on the average viewer.

Fresh waves of technology and fashion should have put this antique format out of circulation. But the desks are more numerous than ever, especially after 11 p.m. At a time when television is dissolving into subculturally specialized, aesthetically disheveled fragments, the late-night host somehow has held on to iconic status—trumpeted by network publicity, debated in workplaces, dissected in reams of articles such as this one. It is as if he (and it is still universally a he) has become a critical common referent in a hopelessly uncentered culture. Addressing a public of infinitely malleable size, creating events from thin air, the host is asked to engineer the illusive unities, bridging gaps that our politicians long have been unable to navigate.

How does a host address a nation of subcultures? The one subject known to us all is television itself—its rules, its rhetoric, its accumulated history and literature. And so the common language has been an ironic subversion of television itself: the most popular shows on T.V. right now are about T.V.—"Murphy Brown," "Home Improvement" and (fitfully) "Seinfeld," to name three top contenders. Others, such as "Roseanne," "Married ... With Children" and "The Simpsons," invert the model family shows of T.V.'s past. Self-referential irony, thought to be the annoying trivium of the 1980s, has settled in for the long haul.

ALEX ROSS writes for *The New York Times*.

Through this haze, the hosts have stumbled on what might be called the politics of irony. They who grasp it wield strong cultural-political clout. While the vast following that upheld Johnny Carson's "Tonight Show" is gone forever, the more narrow but intense regard for a David Letterman or a Rush Limbaugh has no less weight. The new host is a sly virtuoso of layered meanings, a contrapuntalist of revealed and concealed messages. The new kind of host is also—critically—not a liberal. Earnest, Clintonian liberalism so far has floundered in the new conditions. Conservatives, it turns out, know their T.V. better.

But first, some talk-show history. The original hosts were nationally syndicated gossip columnists, hired by radio to simulate glamour for 1930s audiences. Walter Winchell, of the *Daily Mirror*, won fame second to none simply by sitting at his table at the Stork Club, gathering gossip for his monologues. Celebrities came to pay homage, and he would report their quips and exploits alongside questionable stories from all sources—thus an atmosphere of "guests" circulating around him. One-third of the nation watched in fascination as he became a figure of national importance, preaching a blend of gung-ho patriotism and gangsterish apathy. FDR and J. Edgar Hoover were both in his debt. He stamped himself on the flow of events around him with an array of stylistic tics: the spastic, gibberish-flavored prose style; the much-imitated triple-dot punctuation; the grand salutation to "Mr. and Mrs. America, and all the ships at sea." He was vainglorious, nasty, vague, central.

Louella Parsons, columnist for the all-powerful Hearst newspapers and host of "Hollywood Hotel," was no less potent; she too boosted Hoover, although entertainment remained her primary interest. She is best remembered for two interventions she made in the careers of performers entering film from radio: the destruction of Orson Welles, whose debut film *Citizen Kane* unwisely attacked Hearst head-on, and the elevation of Ronald Reagan, who was lucky enough to come from her hometown of Dixon, Illinois. Parsons promoted Reagan at the outset of his career, finding him a bit role in the 1937 film version of *Hollywood Hotel*.

Parsons never made it to television, and Winchell's

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attempt at a show in the '50s failed miserably. The most popular hosts in the new medium were far less tendentious and imposing. Arthur Godfrey hosted folksy chat shows with titles like "Arthur Godfrey and His Friends," drawing audiences of up to 80 million people. Ed Sullivan carried a variety show just by standing around. The big names were on during the early evening; no one thought much of the late-night slot. But a Los Angeles radio host named Steve Allen drew a large following with "Tonight!," his free-wheeling NBC comedy show. His wacky stunts and frenetic good cheer made him the chief hipster of the '50s, and not beyond.

After Allen left, what became known as "The Tonight Show" fell into the hands of a genuine original. Jack Paar was an eminently normal-looking man, a former G.I. entertainer who planted himself at a desk instead of scampering around like Allen had. He would begin his shows in a low, well-modulated voice, exuding a dangerous calm. Then, periodically, but never predictably, he would lurch into disgruntled, pathetic soliloquies, decrying some indignity visited upon him by the network or the press. His emotional exhibitionism once led him to walk off the set in the middle of a broadcast.

Paar quit abruptly in 1962 after only five years. There was no other host like him on the horizon, and corporate T.V. did not seem to mind. Consolidating enormous gains in advertising revenue, the networks did not seek out difficult personalities. Daytime chat shows with Mike Douglas and Merv Griffin were idylls of complacency and vacuousness. The 1960s and '70s saw a few departures from formula, most of them either short-lived or half-hearted. "The Phil Donahue Show," originating from Ohio in 1967, drew on its bottomless fund of taboo subjects; but even in trying to break its own spell, network T.V. created instant clichés. Politicians, in turn, adopted all the robotic mannerisms perfected by the newscasters. Television fell into a shabby haze, a Dean Martin stupor, through which nothing ever penetrated fully.

Johnny Carson, whose shiveringly mellow "Tonight Show" reigned supreme from 1962 to 1992, resisted that stupor only halfway. Early on, he exuded a vague anti-establishment ethos, tending toward outright liberalism. But over time, the show approached an equilibrium of numbing blandness. The monologues were all charmingly mediocre, the conversations charmingly inert. The most memorable image in the last show was a dramatic floor shot of The Desk, plunged into darkness at the end of a typical-broadcast-day montage. "The Larry Sanders Show," HBO's brilliant talk-show satire, captures the bleary mediocrity that hung over Carson's final years and now blankets the bathetic regime of Jay Leno.

Still, Carson acquired an imperial grace over his twenty-nine-year era. He became a shadow president for a leaderless public, winning trust by never betraying expectations. His final moments as America's Host—alighting from Burbank in a helicopter, waving distantly to the cameras—were nothing less than Reaganesque. Like Reagan, Carson answered an increasingly desperate hunger for an enduring national icon, cool and agreeable and remote. Unlike Reagan, he really did have nothing to say and departed a widely beloved enigma.

DAVID LETTERMAN BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

If Carson closed out the story of the National Hosts, then it's hard to find a place for David Letterman. He came on stage as an insincere endnote to the Carson phenomenon, a cynical extension of a faded form. He had no trace of Carson's transcontinental, Vegas-tinged suavity. But he gathered a solid following through NBC's "Late Night," and with his new show on CBS he is improbably leading the "late-night war." He is the model of the new television personality, less intent on

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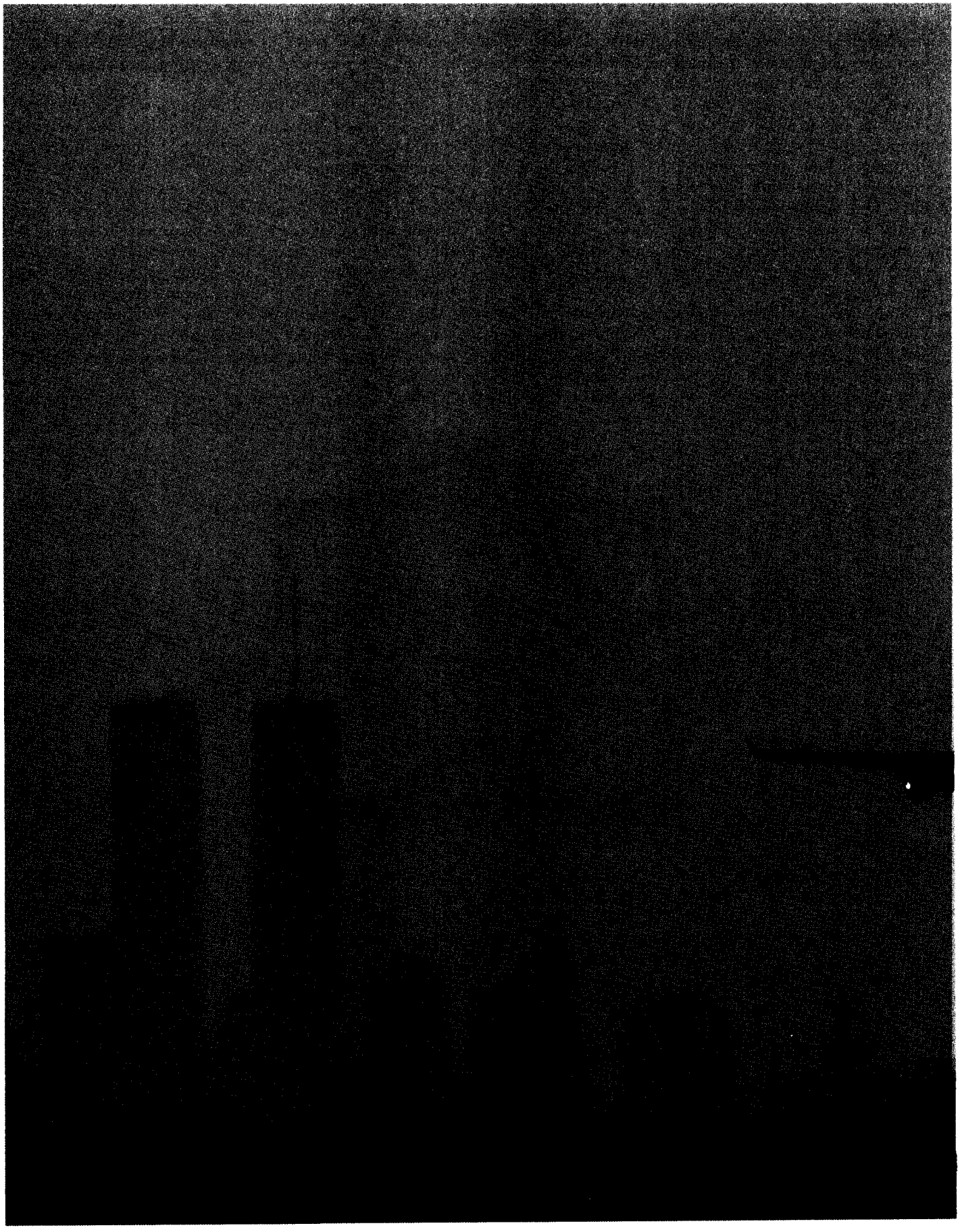

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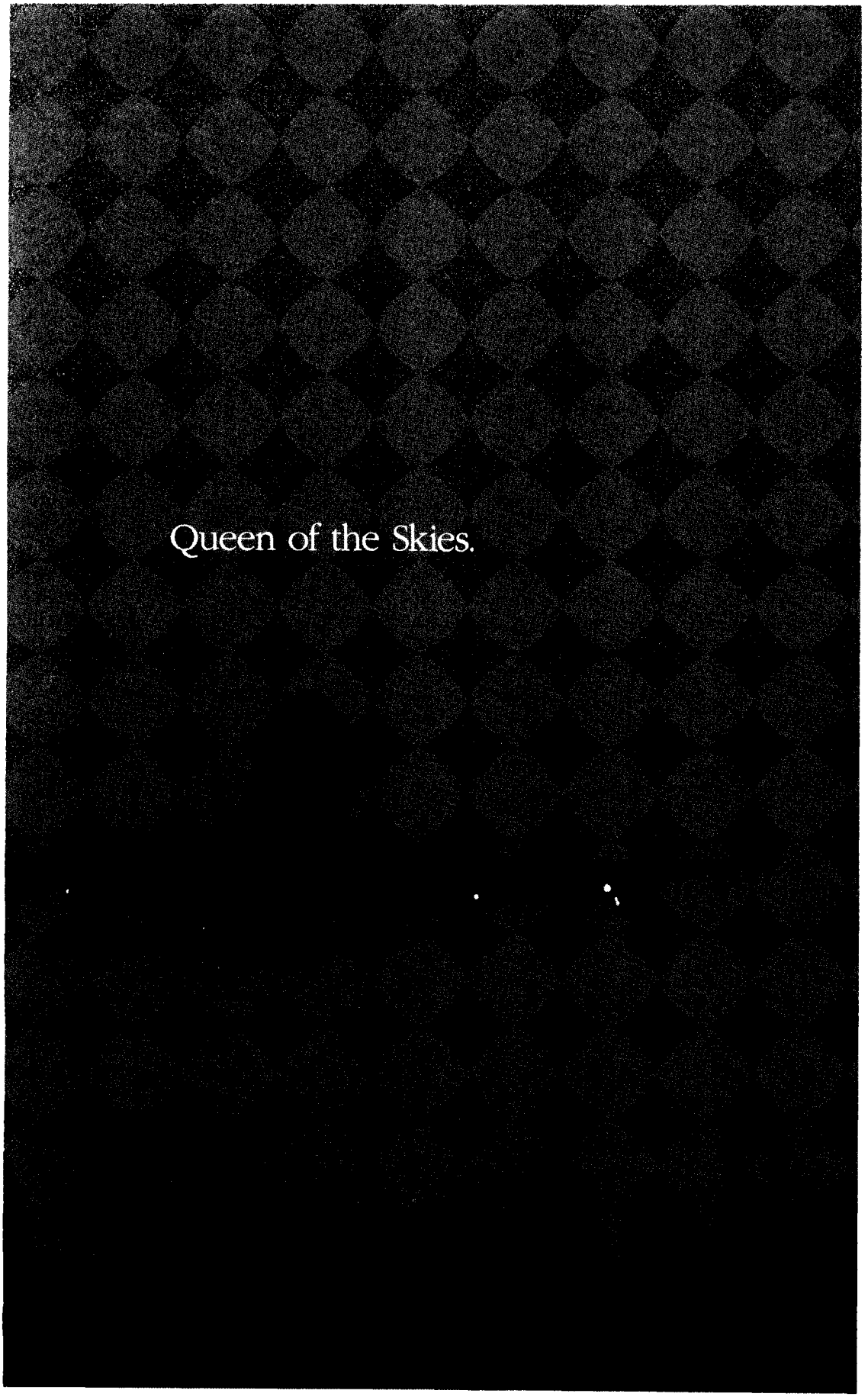

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universal adoration than on a kind of maladjusted—and ironic—realism.

His first incarnation, as the anti-host, the anti-Carson, was the most amusing and also the most limited. "Late Night," in the early and mid-'80s, was "The Tonight Show" gone to seed. Every component in its daily lineup—set, guests, sidekicks, recurring characters, funny animals—was a deliberately inadequate echo of Carson's show-biz juggernaut. Letterman grinned knowingly through all the expert nonsense and shabbiness around him. Draped with ominous praise—"hip," "subversive," "ironic" and "in tune with the zeitgeist"—the show fit snugly the culture of the mid-'80s. In his book *Boxed In*, Mark Crispin Miller tagged Letterman with "that air of laid-back irony against which all enthusiasm seems contemptible"—the empty irony that undermines a dominant mode without advancing anything to take its place. At his most smug in 1985, he did a show called "Too Tired To Do A Show" in which he just hung around the office and threw pencils at the ceiling. This was the silent counterculture, the party in the basement den that didn't disturb the parents upstairs.

Seeing that the anti-show had run its course, Letterman retrenched. The collegiate silliness faded away, and the show became a theater of his difficult personality, his mix of white-bread Americana and interstellar eccentricity. His model was no longer the goofy Steve Allen but the slow-burning Jack Paar. But where Paar waged battles with real-life enemies, Letterman fussed over tiny perturbations in his vicinity and gave vent to abstract complaints. At CBS he has taken on a brighter and busier tone, but his act remains essentially the same.

This host's point of departure is his total disregard for celebrity culture. Carson always *seemed* interested. Letterman's interviews with major stars show an impeccable ignorance of their projects and careers. He has endorsed nothing, joined no known political groups or causes, evaded *People* and "Entertainment Tonight." His session with Barbara Walters a couple of years ago was a masterpiece of nondisclosure. For many years he entered the news only on the barely plausible pretext of a crazy woman breaking into his home. Knowing American pop culture's tendency to glaze over its personalities, he makes himself known only through the distorted lens of his little talk-show kingdom.

To a remarkable degree, Letterman constructs his on-air persona simply with words. When he fields responses from guests and random individuals reached by camera or by phone, he is looking for dead words, raw clichés, banalities waiting to be stuffed and mounted. Once he called up a woman operating a concession stand at the Grand Canyon and asked for a description of the view; his stated aim was to hear her say the word "breathtaking." He became greatly agitated when she did not. On-air conversations he's had over the years with his mother, Dorothy Letterman, operate on the same principle. If all else fails, verbal white noise is furnished by Paul Shaffer, the dependable bandleader who speaks in a purified show-biz dialect.

The spin Letterman puts on all this accumulated triteness still falls under the heading of irony, but it can no longer be described as "laid-back." Rather than simply recite clichés in a sarcastic tone, as he did early on, he nervously tampers with them until they become his own. When he introduces a guest as "always talented," for example, he is savoring the dissonance that crops up when the show-biz intro "always personable, very talented" is crunched together. Any strange combination of words intrigues him; he once reported a phrase uttered in the middle of the night on the Home Shopping Club—"Now turn over your swan candlestick holders"—and excitedly announced to his audience: "In the whole history of human civilization, those particular words had never before been uttered together."

On his best nights, Letterman is seized with a sort of broadcasting dementia, parroting television's moribund voices. He becomes the as-if host, speaking grandly to a nonexistent Winchellian public. Setting up a bland joke in his monologue, he abandons the cue card and starts babbling like Dan Rather finally gone over the brink: "In society as we know it today, in this current international situation, this seething caldron of global tension, this overall geopolitical condition of unease in which we presently find ourselves, a condition palpable even in this room, almost tangible even as we speak...." Spinning out endless strings of synonyms, underscoring them with arbitrary gesticulations, Letterman becomes an opulently eccentric, almost aristocratic presence, the sort television was supposed to have disallowed long ago.

The Mad Prophet of the Airwaves eventually gives way to a second, less innocent, pose: the Great White Misanthrope. This is the one with which casual viewers are probably familiar—the middle-aged man with the grimacing grin, the lethally empty gaze, the disgusted snicker. Women guests are treated to a display of nervousness, condescension and adolescent leering. Any young actress or model causes him to be revoltingly smarmy: he might lock her in a bear hug when she first comes onstage, releasing her several seconds after she visibly has begun to squirm. With black guests, he generally leans far back in his chair and loses his colloquial assurance. Any mention of homosexuality throws him into a mild panic.

It is this corrosive persona that draws a following of a million or more 18- to 49-year-old white males. (In his slightly underrated *American Psycho*, Bret Easton Ellis made the cartoon-WASP antihero an eager fan of "Late Night.") T.V. writers tend to describe this aspect of his character in a contemptuous "Gotcha!" tone—as if Letterman had accidentally revealed his true awfulness. But not only is Letterman aware of the problem—"sometimes I even annoy myself"—he goes out of his way to elaborate and exaggerate the lonely white-guy image. Once he related this exchange with a diner in a

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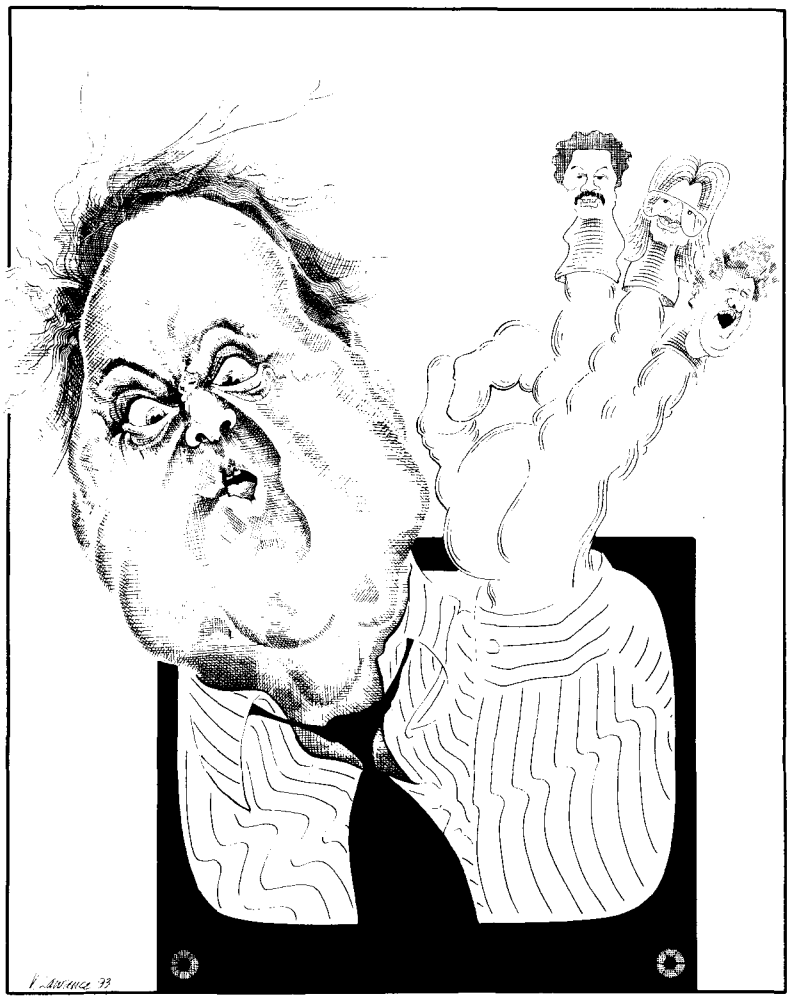
restaurant—Japanese, he emphasized—who offered to share a table when Letterman was dining alone:

LETTERMAN: No, no, I can't do that, I'd be imposing.
JAPANESE DINER: What do you mean?
LETTERMAN: All my life, I've been an imposition.
JAPANESE DINER: I don't understand. What do you mean?
LETTERMAN: I have a personality disorder.
JAPANESE DINER: What kind?

Here Letterman broke off the dialogue, having made the point that the Japanese diner was a peculiarly persistent individual. But the image one carries away is of the famous T.V. star sitting alone in a restaurant, telling strangers that he is socially inept or even mentally diseased. Unlike nearly any other American celebrity you could think of, Letterman does not want to be loved.

After several overblown opening shows, Letterman's "Late Show" on CBS has turned out to be a sort of splendid apotheosis. While holding on to his singular mannerisms, the host seems more content with the everyday routine, much as Bill Murray's cynical weatherman found serenity in *Groundhog Day*. He is nicer to the guests, and the guests now play along when his now-legendary sourness returns. He has gotten under the skin of television's mainstream appeal, and stares out with slightly demented eyes. Meanwhile, his double-pronged technique of disenchantment—the vacant-ironic manipulation of national broadcasting, the entrenched subcultural appeal—has spread in unexpected directions. Rush Limbaugh has turned it around and made it meaningful, although not as meaningful as one might hope.



RUSH LIMBAUGH BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Limbaugh's debut as a television host was not auspicious. It came in the waning days of "The Pat Sajak Show," CBS's pre-Letterman attempt at a late-night franchise. Various people were guest-hosting in Sajak's place, auditioning for a new version of the show. Limbaugh tried out in December 1990. His hour on the air was fatally disrupted by a throng of ACT-UP demonstrators protesting his constant resort to anti-gay remarks on his nationally syndicated radio show. The man who had once attacked homosexuality as "deadly, sickly behavior," who filed a regular "Gerbil Update," wilted before this on-air protest. "He came out full of bluster and left a very shaken man," said a CBS executive. "I had never seen a man sweat so much in my life."

Yet another veteran of the talk-show world was not discouraged by Limbaugh's CBS experience. This was Roger Ailes, best known as a T.V. coach for recent Republican presidents, but a talk-show producer by vocation. He is serious about the format, and his career shows a logical evolution. He was executive producer for "The Mike Douglas Show" in the '60s and '70s, where he perfected the art of making anyone appear comfortable on T.V. In the late '70s, he guided the late-night NBC show "Tomorrow," hosted by Tom Snyder; this was a much pricklier affair. NBC canceled it in 1982 in favor of "Late Night With David Letterman." A decade later, Ailes found in Limbaugh the basis for an entirely new kind of host-driven talk show, with current events as the only guests.

The Ailes-produced "Rush Limbaugh Show," first seen in September of 1992, was dismissed as an aberration by most T.V. critics. All the articles about the "talk-show wars" paid it no attention whatsoever, and even *The Wall Street Journal* had to ask, "Where are the visuals? Why is this man on T.V.?" The host is indeed an unconventional presence. He barks at the viewers as if he were sitting across from them in a noisy restaurant. His figure isn't altogether congruent with the standard rectangular screen. (Perhaps letterboxing would solve this problem.) The studio audience is unsettlingly unanimous; although there is no applause sign, applause cuts off with needle-sharp precision. There is an infomercial ambience.

But people have been watching. A few months into its run, the show's ratings were equal to or greater than Letterman's "Late Night" in some markets (average Nielsens of 3.0). He has gotten better at T.V., mar-

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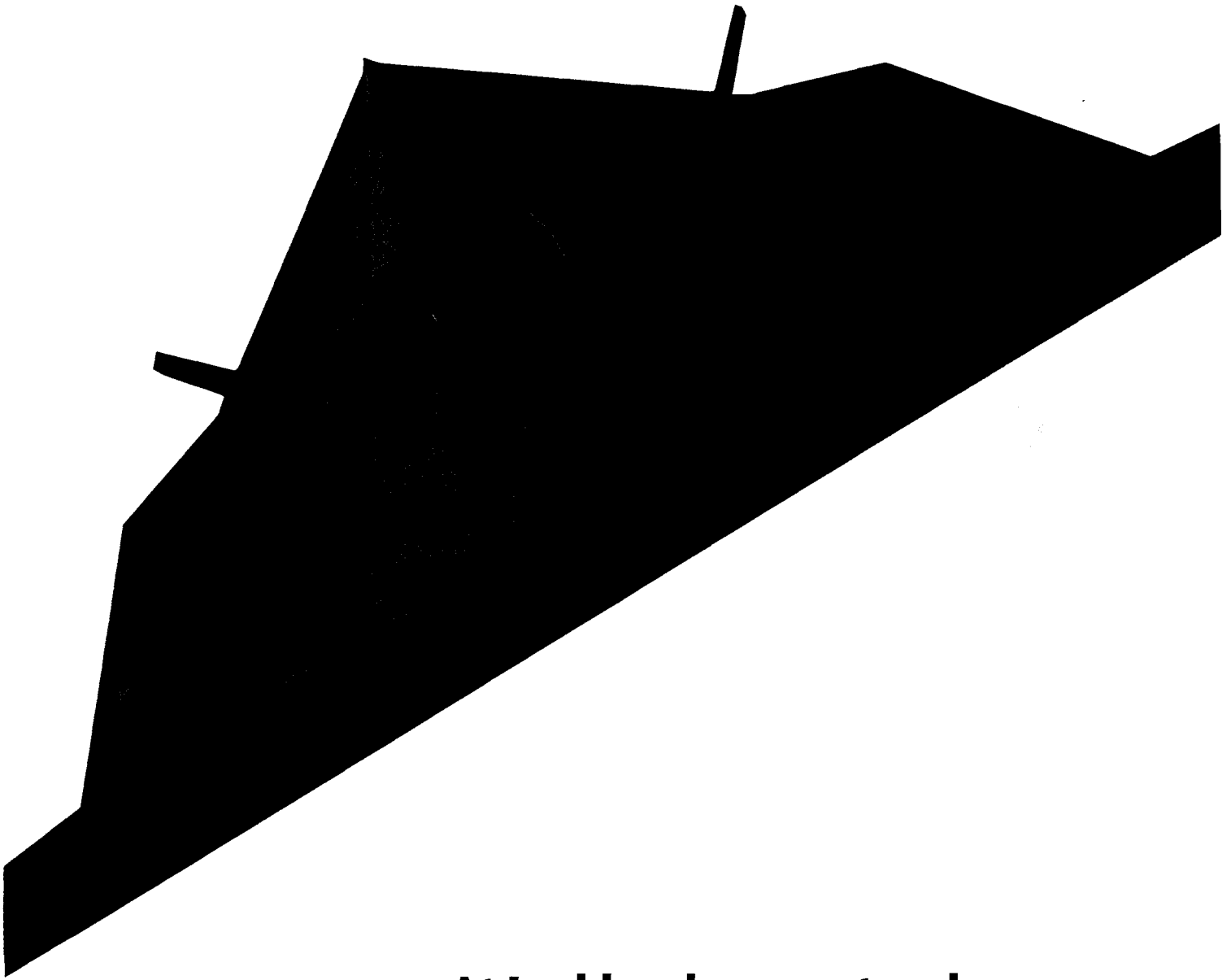

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shaling video clips and man-on-the-street interviews to bear out his points. The best of these recently was a dazzling montage of disparate personalities speaking in favor of traditional values—everyone from Daniel Patrick Moynihan to Louis Farrakhan. Another set of tapes demonstrated John F. Kennedy's allegiance to Reaganomics. But more important, Limbaugh has found ways to go against the grain of the medium, to resist its standardizing pressure. He has learned to replicate on T.V. the intellectual emotion that powers his radio shows. In these respects, his link to Letterman is clearest.

At first glance, they seem as far apart as possible: Limbaugh, with his weekly 20 million listeners, his record-breaking best sellers, his newsletter that has over three times more readers than the magazine you are holding, his "Rush Rooms" in steak houses across the country—and Letterman, with his Viewer Mail, and the woman who breaks into his house. Limbaugh is at his best with on-the-spot political commentary; Letterman wings his way far above, or behind, current events. But there is a solid likeness between the right-winger and the no-winger. Both are cigar-smoking, divorced men in their mid-40s, from solid midwestern backgrounds (Kansas and Indiana, respectively). Both grew up in the 1960s but were untouched by its ferment. Both have ended up in New York, happily disgusted at its squalor. Both are noted for being painfully shy and insecure in person.

Three extant biographies—*The Rush Limbaugh Story: Talent on Loan from God: An Unauthorized Biography* by Paul D. Colford, *Rush!* by Michael Arkush and *The David Letterman Story: An Unauthorized Biography* by Caroline Latham—supply material for more detailed parallels. As Colford points out in passing, both men were devoted listeners of a Chicago-based D.J. named Larry Lujack, whose act combined bombast and skepticism. Limbaugh started in radio with an F.M. rock show, while Letterman took on odd jobs for local T.V. stations. Limbaugh was consistently fired from jobs for interjecting conservative opinions into nonopinion formats. Letterman found similar discouragement when he interpolated comic material—his legendary Indianapolis weather reports, for example, in which imaginary storms decimated far-flung locales. (Letterman tried a talk-radio show in the mid-'70s and got nowhere. "The Nixon-Watergate nonsense," he recalled, "was the perfect example of something about which I knew nothing and couldn't have cared less.")

And there can be no doubt that Limbaugh has studied Letterman's show closely. He makes himself vivid by ruffling items on his desk noisily and giving cameo roles to his staff and crew. He fashions an identity from the driftwood of television language, repeating an ordinary phrase until it becomes his intellectual property. "This show is on the cutting edge of societal evolution," he says, in language usually reserved for sports cars or home entertainment systems. When he sees such prosaic phrases elsewhere in the media, he then can herald the universality of his own influence. Even more Lettermanlike, he alters banalities in midstream: "The views expressed by the host of this program will soon become federal law." The grandiose address to "listeners all across the fruited plain" echoes Letterman's "great American home-viewing public" and Winchell's "Mr. and Mrs. America." The result of all this is that Limbaugh acquires a critical distance from his medium and from himself.

What are Limbaugh's aims in appropriating and paralleling Letterman? The first possibility is that it is all a brilliant ruse designed to disguise a conservative crusade as mere entertainment. When speaking to "mainstream" publications, Limbaugh suspiciously insists that his show is all in good fun, just show biz. "This show exists in the entertainment arena," he said to *Vanity Fair*. His call-screener added, "The politics on this show are secondary to [Limbaugh's] personality." And again, in the book *The Way Things Ought To Be*: "I refuse to use the entertainment forum of my radio show to advance agendas or causes." These, surely, are disingenuous words from the man who gave a huge boost to Pat Buchanan in the New Hampshire primary, who forced disclosure of names in the House banking scandal and who could tilt the Republican primaries in 1996.

And yet if you try to pin down specifically a Limbaugh agenda, a Limbaugh cause, you might end up a little baffled. His first requirement in articulating any position is that it be nonliberal. In essence, if it is nonliberal, it is conservative. He gives little thought to tensions within present-day conservatism. He skips happily from Reagan to Kemp to Bennett to Buchanan and back again. He dedicates himself to small business and local interests, then advocates NAFTA and corporatist economics. His "traditional values" twist gently in the wind, leaning toward moderation when pressed. He has been virtually silent on gay issues, except to echo the party line on gays in the military. Once he even took a call from a Republican gay man in Manhattan, and suggested that people like him should be seen at the next Republican convention.

So too with his thoughts on feminism, which are less a social philosophy than a particularly extreme men-are-different-from-women rant of the kind practiced by stand-up comics. "It can be misused," he says of his term "femi-Nazi," by which he might mean any use not idiosyncratically his own. When his needling critiques of black leaders are attacked as racist, he hollowly responds, "I am the opposite of a racist." Limbaugh is the opposite of opposites. He is a giant double negative, the logical outcome of a point-counterpoint style of political discourse. His straw-man liberal is an empty antinomial category, a clever rerouting of the bland barbs long thrown at conservatives (hence the Nazi rhetoric for feminists). He has an uncanny ability to fast-forward through the tit-for-tat clichés of T.V. debate, doing the pundits in different voices—a one-man McLaughlin Group.

With their churning syntax and overreaching vocab-

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ulary, Limbaugh's stem-winders are themselves a twist on electronic tradition. They often sound like a giant disc jockey put-on, an endless F.M. prank. Periodically Limbaugh plays with this resemblance by hoaxing his own listeners—infamously, his "conversion to Clinton" a couple of weeks before the 1992 election, which incited a *War of the Worlds* panic among millions of American conservatives. Limbaugh's rhetorical vigor makes the line between seriousness, humorous exaggeration and outright absurdity rather blurry. "I demonstrate the absurd by being absurd," he reiterates; but it is not always the liberal position that is so demonstrated.

All the problems posed by Limbaugh's politics are solved if one takes him at his word and sees him as an entertainer. The two "unauthorized" Limbaugh biographies—Colford's is fairly neutral, Arkush's is faintly damning—depict a man who used politics as a means to an entertainment end, rather than the other way around. He was never politically active in his own right, and was not even registered to vote until the mid-'80s. Reagan, the man he trumpets as God walking on earth, never received his vote. He measures his success purely in terms of media statistics—the number of stations in his syndicated empire, the number of weeks his books stay on the best-seller list, the Nielsen ratings for his T.V. show. He was absolutely exultant when Clinton won the election, knowing that a Republican party in opposition would bolster his appeal. "They think that my era of dominant influence has come crashing down," he roared. "It has, in fact, barely begun. My era of dominant influence now shall come to the fore."

What is that influence exactly, if not a strictly political one? Some have called Limbaugh a rabble-rouser in the mold of Father Coughlin or Huey Long. A better comparison, once again, would be Walter Winchell, the gossip columnist as national statesman. Limbaugh very often grasps ideology through personalities; he is constantly recounting his encounters with everyone from Margaret Thatcher to Charles Barkley. Commentary and comedy blend with news, anecdotes and a great many traditional radio bits (weird news, off-the-cuff endorsements) thrown in for good measure. But in the end, he is something completely new: a vertically integrated media complex for like-minded conservatives, plus entertainment for the broader mass of perennial skeptics. His appeal is actually more diverse than Letterman's, seeming to encompass more female viewers and more older viewers. Almost anyone from any group could be hooked by his bravura display of politics as entertainment, and vice versa, or whatever else you want to call it. As the opposite of the opposite of what used to be conservatism, Limbaugh can only fall back on his own burgeoning selfhood to hold together his political platform. Two of his favorite phrases are all too easily interchangeable: "This program *is about the truth*" and "*This program is about* what I think." The politics of ego become inseparable from the culture of irony.

And irony is what, after all, connects Limbaugh and Letterman and the television history they both refract. Irony can only be recovered in reference to a dominant language, a dominant medium, and television is without question such a medium. Letterman has assumed authority by undercutting the host formula and pretending to hate his job. Limbaugh tries to unite conservative subcultures into a broad political base by piling skepticism on top of fuzzy nostalgia. Both connect with a culture that is viscerally alert to media manipulation, but that is also a sucker for self-consciousness.

They have their colleagues in the political arena. Ronald Reagan, the former announcer, used the tropes of television and a cunning wit to distance himself from the idea of himself, to create a stage persona that T.V. audiences found appealing on its own terms. The substance of his views had taken shape long before, but irony propelled them through the screen. George Bush, with little ironic talent, valiantly attempted to parlay Reagan's technique into a rationale for an entire administration. Even more telling is the example of Ross Perot, who mixes his super-direct facts and figures with a dazzling (and, it turns out, uncontrollable) defiance of expectations. A new plateau of ironic politics was officially reached when the Texan responded to intimations of mental instability by dancing with his daughter to the strains of Patsy Cline's "Crazy."

All politicians, of course, are ironists to the extent that they are all dissemblers. But the Democratic Party seems remarkably inept in the face of Letterman-Limbaugh culture. It has mastered guerrilla-level media manipulation, but its candidates perennially adopt an earnest tone that television cuts to shreds. The Clinton people, who ought to be young enough to know the territory by heart, show no grasp of irony at all. Al Gore put in a valiant appearance on Letterman's show, of which both he and Clinton seem to be fans; but the idea is to be a commanding host, not a well-behaved guest. Clinton himself—fathomlessly earnest and deaf to the nuances of Limbaugh's and Letterman's posturing—is at sea in a culture drenched in detachment. His frozen smile gives him the look of a sidekick handing out prizes.

Placing no distance between himself and his image, prizing an unmediated communication with the voters, Clinton buys into the liberal illusion that there is a third choice, beyond radicalism and irony—a choice of reasonableness, decency, meaning. That may be why he has so far failed to connect intuitively and decisively with the American public of today, and why his strongest demographic group is still the elderly. Clinton has yet to grapple with the climate in which he is operating and with the culture that insistently refuses to take him to heart. If he wants to gain some ground, he could start by watching T.V. more closely after 11:35 p.m. The real Culture War, he might discover, has nothing whatsoever to do with the religious right. •

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No one who has visited Civil War battlefields can be surprised at the statistics of the war's casualties (an estimated total of 623,000 deaths). At Shiloh, trenches of the opposing armies are so close to one another that soldiers could have reached out and touched their enemies with their muskets—or so it seems. This neighborly slaughter gives that war a particular chill missing from the impersonal bombs and missiles of our advanced times.

Gettysburg, the apex battle of the Civil War, differed from many of the other battles in that it had classical deployments over large spaces; still, when we visit the field over which Pickett's division charged, when we remember descriptions of the aftermath in which the field was said to be carpeted with bodies, the space seems cruelly smaller.

Gettysburg (New Line) attempts to re-create that battle. Great care and historical scruple have gone into it. The writer-director, Ronald F. Maxwell, best known from T.V., based his screenplay on a novel by Michael Shaara and set out to make a crisis in our history vivid to a generation not noted for its concern with history. *Gettysburg* runs four hours plus intermission.

Significant moments of planning on both sides, large sequences of battle during July 1-3, 1863, are ranged before us, and the result is the opposite of what we might expect. The military sequences are gripping: the "human" interludes, included to relieve us and hold our interest, are sometimes tedious. These scenes between officers or between officers and men presumably have some basis in fact but come out as fiction. It's as if Maxwell was firm when following a blueprint of history but then wobbled with dialogue—and with casting—when he had to create character.

The least pleasant comment first. Richard Jordan, who died since the picture was finished, plays General Armistead of the CSA who has a close friend on the Union side. The writing of the role is fruity, and it overwhelms Jordan.

Next, working upward, is Martin Sheen as Robert E. Lee. Here is a figure who has to be quietly godlike, effortlessly noble, agonized but humbly resolute. All that Sheen provides is a Virginia accent. The Confederate defeat at Gettysburg was, as Lee says, his fault, and we ought to be able to suffer with him over that. With Sheen, we are only irritated by his obduracy.

Kevin Conway, a sometimes admirable actor, has what would have been the Victor McLaglen role if this had been a John Ford cavalry epic. Conway is an Irish-born Union sergeant, who calls his commander "colonel darlin'" and who, as he dies, says the colonel is the best officer he's ever served under. Again we step out of history into film.

The cast list is very long, and at the top, in quality, is—of all people—Jeff Daniels. Wearing a huge walrus moustache as Colonel Chamberlain of Maine, he brings some rebellious Maine soldiers into line early in the film with direct, simple address. Daniels has the advantage of the best-written role in the picture, and it's not wasted on him.

Kees van Oostrum, the cinematographer, grades light acutely from predawn to dark. Corky Ehlers has edited so that action is clear and killing is horrible without being exploitative. Randy Edelman's score seems almost literally to carry the picture forward. Maxwell has directed with commitment and competence. If it isn't the sort of battle that Ford or David Lean might have made it, it still has a sense of ghastly fact. More than 5,000 re-enactors—men whose avocation it is to re-enact Civil War battles as members of one unit or another—helped enormously.

Much of the picture was shot on the actual battlefield. This required some adroitness because, as I remember, there are many monuments where the Confederate and Union armies were arrayed beforehand. *Gettysburg* seems destined for educational use. (Preceded by T.V. showing? It was produced by Turner Pictures and could be divided for serialization.) But it's far above the usual filmic teaching tool. Despite the mushy interludes, it fascinates—terribly.

In 1966 came a British film called *Morgan* about the behavior of a highly eccentric artist. Quite early in the film his caprices slipped from frolic to pathology; and later I learned that the title of the picture in Britain was *Morgan–A Suitable Case for Treatment.*

Now comes **Mr. Jones** (TriStar), which could use the same fulfillment of title. However, *Mr. Jones* takes much less time

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Dr. Bethune. *Biographical account of the politically radical Canadian physician who served in the Spanish Civil War and the Chinese revolution. Donald Sutherland is compelling. (Reviewed 8/3/93)* **Ruby in Paradise.** *The writer-director Victor Nunez deals tenderly with a young Tennessee woman who goes to north Florida to change her life. Ashley Judd is completely winning as Ruby. (11/1/93)* **Samba Traoré.** *Another well-composed, affecting tale from Idrissa Ouédraogo of Burkina Faso. Samba returns to his village after committing a big-city crime. Complexities follow. (10/4/93)* **Wittgenstein.** *A gem. Derek Jarman distills a crystalline artwork out of the philosopher's life, aided by Karl Johnson's immaculate performance. (10/11/93)* **—SK**

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to disclose that its protagonist is psychotic. In fact, most of the film is taken up with his treatment—how it's handled and how it involves him with his psychiatrist, played by Lena Olin. Jones is played by Richard Gere.

He is a man in a California city who spends much of his time feeling high. He dances through the streets; he kisses a strange girl in the street and runs off gleefully, chased by her boyfriend; he wangles a job as a construction worker, then stands on the roof beam waving his arms and talking about flying as planes swoop overhead. He is hospitalized briefly, then closes his bank account and takes the attractive teller on a big binge, complete with hotel room and champagne. The binge ends with his climbing on the stage of a concert hall to replace the conductor of a performance of Beethoven's Ninth then in progress. He is hospitalized again.

We never know his real name: Jones is just a handle provided by the hospital. We never know any more about him than that he was a musical prodigy as a child and that he is manic-depressive. Through most of the film, he is thoroughly manic, dueling cleverly with doctors, charming many; the only effect that treatment has on him is to send him into the low end of the pattern: utter despair.

Deep feeling grows between him and his doctor until she crosses the ethical line, sleeps with him and resigns from the hospital. The logical ending of the film is disaster; the ending we get from Eric Roth and Michael Cristofer's screenplay is meltingly ambiguous—and would nag at the film's purpose if it had one.

It's hard to believe that *Mr. Jones* was made to warn us that persistent high spirits can indicate mental illness. It's just a romance with a twist, a dark one. Purpose or not, however, Gere plays the role ebulliently, with frenzy under the fun. Mike Figgis, the English director of *Stormy Monday*, helped Gere to give his best performance since the American remake of *Breathless* (1983).

Figgis had less success with Olin. She is strikingly gifted, as witness her work with Bergman, Kaufman and Mazursky, but here she seems a victim. She's the victim, first, of the make-up artist trying to paint her face into conventionality; second, of discomfort with the language. In her previous English-speaking roles, the Swedish-born Olin played foreigners. The psychiatrist here is said to be Swedish, but she's written in straight American, and Olin misses intonations and phrasings. She may be hurting her talent by trying to force herself into a Hollywood mold. •

The Poet's Burden

By David Bromwich

What Is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics by Adrienne Rich

(Norton, 320 pp., $20)

Collected Early Poems 1950-1970 by Adrienne Rich

(Norton, 452 pp., $27.50)

What Is Found There takes its title from some lines by William Carlos Williams: "It is difficult / to get the news from poems / yet men die miserably every day / for lack / of what is found there." In his attempts at thought Williams was often silly, and it is possible that he meant this literally; but it comes from a late poem ("Asphodel, That Greeny Flower") written after the Second World War, and the mood of hope qualified by anxiety could be heard about that time in poets of the most disparate tendencies. Wallace Stevens, in the middle of the war, writing a coda to "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," wheedled with his audience uncharacteristically: "How simply the fictive hero becomes the real; / How gladly with proper words the soldier dies, / If he must, or lives on the bread of faithful speech." The poet was doing his job in the war, as the soldier did his, or so the metaphor implied. The poet anyway offered "the bread of fateful speech"; and more honor was in the gesture than may have appeared. Both Stevens and Williams were too old then to serve as actual soldiers, and their hopes for poetry were uneasily linked to a distant pride in those who risked their lives.

Adrienne Rich goes in for a more consistent sort of poetic soldiering. Since 1968 or so, she has seen herself as a bringer of news in verse, the news that men and women require as much as their daily bread. Her work still bears her signature and yet it has been, where possible and as far as possible, work on behalf of the deprived and disesteemed: lesbians, gays, African Americans, Latin Americans, the poor, the unemployed and the ill-employed, the undervalued. Whether or not people are dying for want of poetry—a suggestion that Rich entertains, but not too literally—she has found it a fertile premise to suppose that poetry might help people to live more completely.

It is a high-minded wish; and the poet who never felt its appeal was probably never a poet. The last systematic-looking attempt to keep the wish alive was the early critical program of I. A. Richards, in *Principles of Literary Criticism* and elsewhere, but the idea goes back to the second generation of utilitarians—to Mill under the influence of his reading of Wordsworth and his friendship with Carlyle. Educationally, much good can come of a hypothesis that people, in some quasi-organic sense, need poetry. It may not hold every cynicism at bay, but at least it keeps one idealism alive. Difficulties start to intrude, snags of detail and definition, when the soldier/poet/provider/bringer-of-news innocently asks: "How do I put into my poems 'what is found there'?"

The answer in *What Is Found There* begins with the epigraphs, all drawn from the sub-critical, rhetorical, hortatory world of feeling that these notebooks easily inhabit. Muriel Rukeyser is quoted as saying:

> Dead power is everywhere among us—in the forest, chopping down the songs; at night in the industrial landscape, wasting and stiffening the new life; in the streets of the city, throwing away the day. We wanted something different for our people: not to find ourselves an old, reactionary republic, full of ghost-fears, the fears of death and the fears of birth. We want something else.

The style of continuous approximate eloquence, lending itself to mixed metaphor almost as a weary duty, is a distinct idiom mostly heard in left-wing literature (though not only there, as many country-western lyrics are alive to attest). Casually as it comes, a phrase like "throwing away the day" is bad poetry, and therefore not good prose. Still, one is apt to feel "Yes, I've known those

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moods, pretty much—that same feeling of waste," and the vague melodrama of thrown away sentences works on you as if it were a deep-lying confirmation of the waste. Another epigraph, from Audre Lorde—"new combinations, extrapolations and recognitions from within ourselves"—follows soon after to give the positive side.

Much of Rich's book is composed of quotations like these—some of them quite long, with whole poems by poets who are little-known. (I enjoyed one discovery, a poem by Lynn Emmanuel, but have seldom read a book that quoted so much bad poetry.) Not since Auden's *A Certain World* has a living author been treated by a publisher with this degree of indulgence. But Auden's commonplace book was an exuberant anthology, and skipping the obiter dicta you could work out a reading list for several winters. *What Is Found There* is more like the clippings of an average summer, with captions that grew, with a little prodding, into little clumps of essays. The message is flat and predigested. The peoples of North America have been maimed, trodden under, anesthetized by the culture of capitalism, even as they have been cheated of their thoughts and sensations by the relentless march of technology.

I wrote that last sentence very fast, as Rich wrote the book, and trusted it to turn out looking like a random passage from the book. I was not quite fast enough. Here is an *almost* random passage, except that it comes at the end of a chapter:

> And perhaps this is the hope: that poetry can keep its mechanical needs simple, its head clear of the fumes of how "success" is concocted in the capitals of promotion, marketing, consumerism and in particular of the competition—taught in the schools, abetted at home—that pushes the "star" at the expense of the culture as a whole, that makes people want stardom rather than participation, association, exchange and improvisation with others. Perhaps this is the hope: that poetry, by its nature, will never become leashed to profit, marketing, consumerism.

Apart from the trick of reiteration—("perhaps this...")—a comfortable pitcher's mound that sinks to a sand trap for the writer overstimulated by public speaking—this is about as resourceless as fluent prose can get. The threadbare catalogues are not heightened by a trace of precision: the "tions" and "ings" and "isms" are put through their paces one more time and then one more; so that, when a slight shift occurs ("promotion" becoming "profit"), it seems an afterthought without consequence for logic or tone. The practical criticism in these notebooks is written with a different diction, but the mental processes that led up to it have not been appreciably different. Rich can quote a long stretch of contemporary free verse that ends in a Whitmanlike catalogue of events and place names, and then ask, or rather intone:

> Is this lesbian poetry? Yes—and most potently—because it is grounded in and insistent to grasp the poet's own white Southern Christian culture with its segregated history and legacy of contradictions, the beauty and sorrow of its landscape, its sexual codes and nightmares. She knows the region's living creatures, how they move and unfold, how wild country and gardens coexist, she pays attention to people; she tries to "remember, and failing that, invent" (Monique Wittig) where a white woman can stand in that heritage. Is this "Southern poetry?" Yes—in a new way: the white woman turned outsider as lesbian connects differently with the white southern literary tradition, Agrarians and Fugitives, required reading in college, Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, their loyalties and affinities with the Confederate dead.

ADRIENNE RICH BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

It is certainly well for a writer to pay attention to people, and to herself and to the things around her. Most of the encomium would hold true for all good poetry at all times in all places; the attempts at specification are as loose and optional as the spliced grammar of the final sentence: woman turned outsider as lesbian, outsider turned lesbian as woman, lesbian turned woman as outsider. All the possibilities sound immensely fruitful, and a good critic of course need never do more than point, but the intent here is not to point (*what* loyalties? *what* affinities?) but to commit oneself excitedly, quotably, in the breathless manner peculiar to literary and literary-political advertisements on the run.

Even by the ad hoc rules of the partly autobiographical journalistic genre that Rich has here devised, she does one thing very questionable. She condescends to herself. The young Adrienne Cecile Rich is made to appear so typically illusioned—so artless and thoughtless an example of the aesthete as '50s cold war imperial beneficiary and exploitee—that one wonders out of what unglowing cinders the formidably confident prophet of the notebooks could have arisen. Because I was so silly yesterday, I am so wise today: it is a contemptible theory, when you think about it, and more observed as a convention of a therapeutic culture than believed by anyone in private. My younger self was more demanding and more given to admirations than his successor. Is the comparison all to the advantage of the successor? The disabused, the gender-fortified, solidarity-

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seeking and solidarity-finding Adrienne Rich of the present gives a thorough trouncing to the Yale Younger Poet of 1951—a too-academic success as she now thinks her then self, honored but not honorable; the success being possible only within constraints half understood and less than half acknowledged. Doubtless, the mature person who bears the same name has one degree more right to make such a judgment than anyone else.

But what if the tables were turned? What if the author of "Living in Sin"—a memorable poem written in the '50s and full of Rich's best qualities: anecdotal ease and nervous energy, poignancy free of self-pity and wit that could pour itself calmly into every detail—what if that author could judge the conscience-stricken reviser who snipped a word from a passage that once mildly deplored

> that morning light
> so coldly would delineate the scraps
> of last night's cheese and three sepulchral bottles;
> that on the kitchen shelf among the saucers
> a pair of beetle-eyes would fix her own—
> envoy from some black village in the mouldings...

altering the last line to read:

> envoy from some village in the moulds-ings...

That revision, canonized in the *Collected Early Poems*, was not done for sound or sense, and the young author would just possibly have found absurd the state of mind of the politic elder who enforced the change.

The revisions in this large volume for the most part are remarkably light. The author has not been at pains to modify the impression of her early work; and in her generation no other apprenticeship was at once so gifted and so ingratiating. There are good poems in *A Change of World* (1951) and *The Diamond Cutters* (1955), where the manner still seems eclectically imitative: Auden and Frost are the main influences, but the author's retrospective note confesses to many others, "even English Georgian poets." (Someday, in the same way, people will confess to "even American Black Mountain poets.") But all of her work in this phase passes the test of holding your attention line by line. A personal sting and zest come into her writing in the third and fourth books, which seem to me her best, *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* (1963) and *Necessities of Life* (1966). The poems have become irritable in a positive sense, with the readiness of someone awake to every elusive stimulus. Gone are the sonnets about buildings at Harvard or Oxford, about the art of the past and the lesson it teaches; though a line from one of those poems stands as a warning over the door of Rich's next phase: "A too-compassionate art is half an art."

Compassion was a late result. It was preceded by tormenting self-doubt, a sense of grief or grievance to which the poems of the '60s offer motives only partly digested from personal experience. The rhetoric is high and tense now, not tentative, with a confidence in the need for political engagement much in advance of the author's information. The turmoil of moods comes out in the titles of these years: *Leaflets* (1969), *The Will to Change* (1971) and *Diving into the Wreck* (1973), the last being the immediate successor to the volumes collected here. The final two sections of *Leaflets* and all of *The Will to Change* are really notations—strident and untethered, beyond any expectation that a reader should supply the missing connections. Frayed as they are, and split off from any imaginative discipline, the poems are also oddly free of personal posturing. But the style has begun to be stereotyped.

The change, from her poetry of the late '50s and early '60s, looks now as if it were a deliberate refusal of poise, as if the author slammed down the piano lid: "No more of *those* songs." The puzzle is that her conversion should have been so complete over so short an interval. When you read "Peeling Onions," a poem of 1961—which begins "Only to have a grief / equal to all these tears"—you are in a world of rueful wit: "There's not a sob in my chest. / Dry-hearted as Peer Gynt / I pare away, no hero, merely a cook." The self-mockery and lament are intimate with each other, and the claim of neither is compromised. Grinding frustration, the neighbor of grief, lies somewhere in back of the poem, but it declares its interest with a fit of free verse against the endless rhyming of domestic waste. The poem closes on a headlong one-line paragraph: "These old tears in the chopping bowl." One wonders first at the subtlety of feeling, then at the economy and above all at the speed. As late as 1966, in "The Demon Lover," Rich was deepening this vein of her work to take in hauntings quite unsusceptible to irony.

The year 1968 was the crossroads. It is fairly represented here by the prose conclusion of "The Burning of Paper Instead of Children," a meditation on the trial of Daniel Berrigan.

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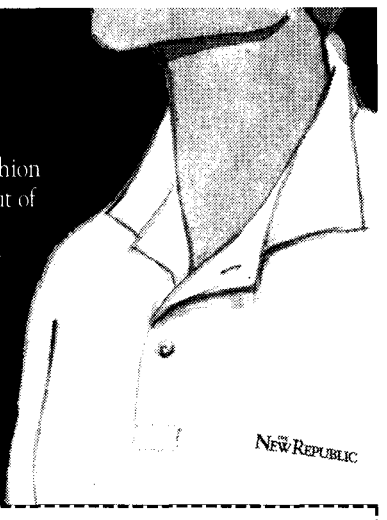

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> I am composing on the typewriter late at night, thinking of today. How well we all spoke. A language is a map of our failures. Frederick Douglass wrote an English purer than Milton's. People suffer highly in poverty. There are methods but we do not use them. Joan, who could not read, spoke some peasant form of French. Some of the suffering are: it is hard to tell the truth; this is America; I cannot touch you now. In America we have only the present tense. I am in danger. You are in danger. The burning of a book arouses no sensation in me. I know it hurts to burn. There are flames of napalm in Catonsville, Maryland. I know it hurts to burn. The typewriter is overheated, my mouth is burning, I cannot touch you and this is the oppressor's language.

The voice of seven years earlier had been credible and agile—wry, you may call it, but that is a poor way of saying that it had found a tone for attacking the smaller demons across a surprisingly wide range of experience. The new voice is ominous, as it aims to be, but that turns out to mean it belongs to nobody's life. This dry litany of crimes and recriminations, drained of apparent affect, was part of the metaphysical-moral climate of Godard's movies of the time, but the movies had pictures and it made a difference. The comparison of the writer's "heat" to the agony of children burned by napalm will not bear comment.

Rich was turned about in the late '60s, driven from crisis to crisis, threshed by every storm and prompted to the full-throated utterance of every plausible, half-pondered slogan, all with the same relentless, experimental, impersonal air. The poems start to have titles like "To Frantz Fanon" and lines like "LeRoi! Eldridge! listen to us, we are ghosts / condemned to haunt the cities where you want to be at home." The image of the poet as bloodless revenant, one of the white Undead (the sort of assertion that gladly takes a *we* where an *I* would resist): this casual allegory bears no resemblance to the portrait that Rich had associated with herself in "By No Means Native," from her first book:

> As for himself, he joined the band of those
> Who pick their fruit no matter where it grows,
> And learn to like it sweet or like it sour
> Depending on the orchard or the hour.
> By no means native, yet somewhat in love
> With things a native is enamored of—
> Except the sense of being held and owned
> By one ancestral patch of local ground.

Under the pressure to change, the memory of moods that had once been real to her is liable to sudden distortions, but it is her memory of poetry that most betrays her. "What are you doing here at the edge of the deathcamps, Vivaldi?" she writes, in a solemn challenge so self-absorbed as to forget its source in Allen Ginsberg's "A Supermarket in California," with the cheerful salute: "And you, Garcia Lorca, what were you doing down by the watermelons?"

A revealing word that comes up more than once in Rich's early work is "pedagogues." The pedagogues are always on the scene before we arrive—Rich cannot bring herself to despise them; their trusted ironic wisdom is one step ahead of her—but her poetry seems to say: if the juice is gone, it is because of them. Later the pedagogues turn into "*conservateurs*": "I have learned to smell a *conservateur* a mile away: / they carry illustrated catalogues of all that there is to lose." Now, on the jacket flap of the *Collected Early Poems*, the same figure appears under a more familiar name: "With more than 700,000 copies of her books sold, Adrienne Rich's work is unequalled today in reclaiming serious poetry from scholars and returning it to the lives of general readers." I wonder how many of those sales are owed to classroom assignments by scholars and pedagogues and *conservateurs*?

Rich sincerely believes that poetic tradition is a kind of theft: she herself, according to the fable, is a new maker of a mosaic of traditions, her *trouvailles* pulled uniquely from the wreckage. But the good girl who no longer sits at anyone's feet—this presentation, too, is traditional, and it can grow tiresome: "I'd rather / taste blood, yours or mine, flowing / from a sudden slash, than cut all day / with blunt scissors on dotted lines / like the teacher told." She writes as if all her teachers were cereal boxes.

Her actual teachers were the second generation of modernists, in poetry and criticism. But in relation to modernist poetry generally, which she picks at with an air of baffled annoyance, Rich's critical role has now become as specialized as that of a clearance-signing petty bureaucrat of the Ming dynasty. She is the professional scold—the famous living rebuke to all those famous dead delinquents. "Look at their politics," she says and says again. Her refrain practically becomes a parody of itself, on the order of "How bad they were!—Eliot, Pound, Stevens, Tate, the lot. (Sometimes I think Whitman was better, then again sometimes not.) How little they paid for their errors! And yet, something sticks in my mind about those poems. Or maybe it doesn't really, or shouldn't, I can't remember, I'm not really sure. Don't bad politics make the poems worse? Aren't they *shot through* with sin? Maybe that's too harsh; no, maybe it's the justice of History. But here, here is the poem, see for yourself." And then she quotes and scolds and pats and scolds some more.

The revelations in *What Is Found There* all happen at furious speed—a sign, perhaps, of boredom in the compiler—and the shorthand leaves you blinking to make sure what point has been made. Was that a new mug-shot just now, or an old one held up for re-exposure? In Rich's undergraduate lecture notes,

> penciled on the endpapers of the copy of *Four Quartets* that I still have, I find: "This = problem of a Christian poem in a secular age—you can't accept it unless you accept Christian religion." The lecturer was F. O. Matthiessen, one of Eliot's earliest interpreters, who one year later, in a suicide note, described himself as a Christian and a socialist. He was also a homosexual.

Well, and? Should he have said "a Christian and a socialist and a homosexual," his suicide note rewritten to your canons of discretion and honesty? Or do you mean that there was something weird about such a man admiring Eliot? The notebook-keeper cannot be bothered, she has gone on to something else.

The most unexpected entry is on Stevens. Of the established poets of the older generation, he was the one from whom Rich learned most, the one to whom she returned for surprise and self-renewal. She has some interesting short observations on "The Idea of Order at Key West" and "The Man with the Blue Guitar." But she singles out as startling achievements two lyrics much less widely known, "Dry Loaf" and "The Dwarf." One must have read a good many commentaries on Stevens, including appreciations by other poets, to see how uncommon these choices are, and how much they tell about Rich. Both poems explore a vein of sharp realism wrung out almost to drabness. Slightly incantatory, they do not try to sing. The notes are merely placed, just so, a remembered deposit, a trace. Rich admires "Dry Loaf" and "The Dwarf" for the way they show the poet "capable of shedding any predictable music"; and this was the moment in *What Is Found There* that reminded me that Rich is a poet. By the end of the chapter, she is back at the mill of denials and permissions. Stevens's was, after all, a poetry of "the riven self, the emotionally unhappy white man with a 'fairly substantial income,' the fugitive in the imagination who is repeatedly turned back by a wall of mirrors." Then comes a dutiful mention of "the collective poetry" of every culture, and with a last reassuring bump-down the chapter is over.

Regarding the most original American poets, Whitman and Dickinson, Rich over the years has moralized herself into

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an ambivalence so perfect that she is now equally uncertain of her past and present opinions. On the one hand, "Didn't they," in spite of appearances, "seem to fit their age, these 'beginners'? Didn't they act out precisely the chartered roles, the constructions of white, middle-class masculinity and femininity that suited the times?" Let us try to recall. Middle-class masculinity: "Steep'd amid honeyed morphine, my windpipe throttled in fakes of death, / At length let up again to feel the puzzle of puzzles, / And that we call Being." Middle-class femininity: "Dare you see a Soul *at the White Heat*? / Then crouch within the door." Those quotations are not in these notebooks, and indeed how could they be?

Sensing something faintly wrong, on the next page Rich takes back every word: "They were a wild woman and a wild man, writing their wild carnal and ecstatic thoughts." That feels closer to the truth, but the conclusion is utterly forbidden by an aphorism that greets us twelve chapters later, under the heading *What does a poet need to know?*

> That to track your own desire, in your own language, is not an isolated task. You yourself are marked by family, gender, caste, landscape, the struggle to make a living, or the absence of such a struggle. The rich and the poor are equally marked. Poetry is never free of these markings even when it appears to be. Look into the images.

Of course, this "tracking" is a job that can be done, and in a modern society someone will be found to do it. Whether a poet needs to regard it as a sacred task, whether to treat it so is consistent with the writing of poetry: these are separate questions, of no necessary interest to the tracker.

Recall that the challenge was that we simply "Look into the images." I looked into these:

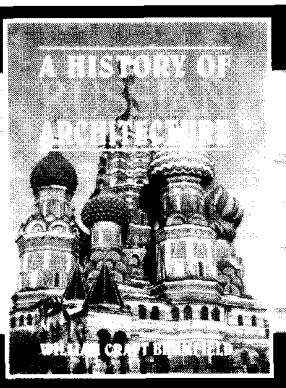
> Beyond siroccos harvesting
> The solstice thunders, crept away,
> Like a cliff swinging or a sail
> Flung into April's inmost day—
>
> Creation's blithe and petaled word
> To the lounged goddess when she rose
> Conceding dialogue with eyes
> That smile unsearchable repose—

Maybe, there, you can read the whole story just as Rich says you should be able to: "Hart Crane, white, middle-class, homosexual, downwardly mobile, child of a grasping loveless marriage, tied forever to a place called Chagrin Falls, Ohio, spoiled, a drunk, a born evader, but keenly faithful to two destructive parents, incidental compensatory idealizer of black men (see 'Black Tambourine' and 'The River,' *passim*) and later of one white woman (see 'The Broken Tower')." For just a moment, it may all come into focus, until a second voice says: "You, fast-track critic, are a liar and a cheat." And suddenly it seems again that these are not images at all, let alone extractable social markings, but words, amazing words.

What Is Found There contains some evocative passages that deserve a better setting: a rare glimpse of a Great Blue Heron on the roof of a house next door; a description of the making of maple syrup, with a page on how the custom and its product are threatened now by the prevalence of acid rain. The politics of these notebooks, as of Rich's recent poems if they could settle for less than everything, would have to be called broadly "environmental." In the notebooks she conveys her feeling for this cause as a passion bigger than resentment, and it is a pity that she should have chosen so diffuse a medium. One feels that a chance has been squandered by an advocate who can speak firmly and not pompously of the things she loves, many of which she sees dying out. Yet Rich has been misled from the start by an analogy between poetic activity and political activism.

"You cannot," she remarks, "tell how [the feelings in politics and poetry] will connect, spreading underground from rootlet to rootlet till every grass blade is afire from every other." But it makes a difference whether the connections occur across a society or in the mind of one person. It matters for what we can suppose the metaphor of fire to mean, and it matters for the sorts of links that will be felt between one root and another. Too credulous a regard for this analogy has taken Rich in her career from poetry to daily poetry to daily prose. She wrote good poems, fairly early, of an inventive delicacy and humor that she has come to disdain; and, later and less often, poems with the tenacity and the earnestness that she has come to prefer. She has written vivid prose, and useful agitational prose, but somewhere on the way a poet who aspired to journalism turned into a journalist troubled by her love of poetry. It is an adaptable blend, likely, sometime, to send up greener shoots than the present notebooks—but not to be confused with the pursuit of either activity in its happiest state.

DAVID BROMWICH is the author of *A Choice of Inheritance* (Harvard University Press) and is working on a study of Edmund Burke.



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The Art of Persecution

By Frank Kermode

Blasphemy: Verbal Offense Against the Sacred from Moses to Salman Rushdie by Leonard W. Levy

(Knopf, 688 pp., $35)

Blasphemy by David Lawton

(University of Pennsylvania Press, 228 pp., $39.95, $16.95 paper)

Blasphemy has a long history, and with the growth of secularism it was possible, for a while, to be deluded into thinking that its history had ended. It has always meant something unpleasant, though not always the same thing. A Greek word, it originally had a range of senses that included "slander" or "speaking ill" of somebody, as well as "impiety." The modern English word "blame" is a secular descendant. The Greeks, however, were hard on impiety, which was speaking ill of the gods; and this was also the prevailing sense in a Western culture that chose Hebraic sources rather than Hellenic sources and, at least in principle, eliminated the use of the word as meaning damage to the self-esteem of mortals.

Leviticus 24:16 ruled that "he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him," whether he was Israelite or alien. For the Jews the offense was simply the abuse of God's name, but for Christians the Godhead has two other Persons and it would be blasphemous to deny this, so Catholics and orthodox Protestants long concurred in persecuting every form of unitarianism as blasphemous. The crime could be extended also to those who defamed or simply disagreed with the church. Less sharply defined, it could then be identified with heresy, apostasy, sacrilege and, in theocratic or quasi-theocratic communities, sedition. It became a political weapon.

Leonard W. Levy's immense and authoritative book is an account, occasionally horrifying, of the development, the expansion and the partial occultation of the concept. The most appalling aspect of blasphemy's history is not its vagueness and its adaptability, but the manner in which authority felt obliged to revenge itself on dissidents. Torture, the tearing out or the boring through of tongues, the brandings and the savage floggings, the calculated horror of the burnings, the grisly exhumation of dead offenders for posthumous punishment and disgrace: all these are difficult for modern liberals to understand. How can these cruelties have had anything to do with religion, especially a religion that calls on us to forgive those who trespass against us? How could Thomas More, so famous as a good man, have consented to the torture and the burning of others?

Several justifications were offered for such practices. Pain, when it is not terminal, can be corrective. It is also properly retributive. And there was a sense that it would be an intolerable burden on the conscience to condone blasphemy, as if by failing to shed guilty blood as cruelly as possible one took blood guilt on oneself—an argument used by persons as disparate as Elizabeth I and Calvin. The horror of the punishment was necessary to extinguish one's own imputed guilt in the crime. Perhaps, in a world where, as the files of Amnesty International testify, it seems that almost no culture lacks a plentiful supply of willing torturers, we should seek some even more dismal and radical explanation.

The Reformation, by dividing Christianity and the European powers, and by printing vernacular Bibles, greatly increased the incidence of savage retribution. Luther, once an advocate of toleration, added new terrors to blasphemy; he preferred the term to heresy, which was regularly used against reform by the Catholics. Anabaptists, Catholics and Jews were to him equally blasphemous. The ayatollahs of reform also detected the crime within their own ranks, especially in the wilder sects. Huge numbers of men and women died painfully because they preferred Bibles to ministers, or renounced the arcane doctrine of the Trinity; the learned and unfortunate Servetus, whom Calvin and the Roman Inquisition competed for the honor of burning, was far from unique. When Sebastian Castellio wrote a book recommending toleration, he was lucky enough to die before they could catch and burn him. Baptists, who declared that nobody should be persecuted for his beliefs so long as he believed in God, were hunted down for saying so.

The extraordinary episode of the English Commonwealth, when censorship was temporarily relaxed and sects grew numerous and often crazy—spiritual libertines, utopians, believers in the Everlasting Gospel that superseded ministers and even the Bible—ended with massacres and new blasphemy laws; Cromwell had grasped that the practice of toleration endangered the new state. Levy is finely detailed about these strange people. His account of the farcical investigation by the Parliament of Abiezer Coppe, the antic Ranter, reminds one of the Chicago hippie trial of 1968. More often the judiciary was simply brutal, as in the sentencing of the Quaker James Naylor, who entered Bristol as Christ entered Jerusalem; despite a trial careful of legal niceties, and involving detailed study of the Hebrew text of Leviticus 24, he was repeatedly pilloried and flogged, to the point of death.

It is agreed that the landmark case for English law and American law was the judgment of Lord Chief Justice Matthew Hale at a trial in 1676, which declared that "the Christian religion is part of the law itself," so that blasphemy fell under the common law and became the province of ordinary criminal courts, with their fickle dependence on precedent. This judgment in part depended on an error in Hale's reading of a Norman French precedent, as Jefferson, a great opponent of this doctrine, was later to demonstrate; but it still has force, more in England than in America, where the First Amendment has severely restricted its force (though it is not everywhere obsolete).

In colonial America, blasphemy was at first narrowly defined in terms of Leviticus, but there was, it seems, a gradual humanization of punishment. There occurred, for instance, the introduction of symbolic executions: you stood a certain time on the gallows with a rope around your neck. And by the eighteenth century blasphemy trials were rare in America. In England, however, persecution thrived in the period of repression at the end of the century and

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the first part of the next, when it was necessary to deal with Thomas Paine and other dissidents, such as the printer Richard Carlile, who had sixty-five convictions in one year, 1820, twelve of them for blasphemy. Here, of course, the religious and the political are inseparable.

In New York in 1811 a man named Ruggles was prosecuted for calling Jesus Christ a bastard (an ancient, formal element in demotic blasphemy). New York had no statute against blasphemy, and it could not be a common law offense because Christianity was not a part of the common law of that state. Still, the Supreme Court of New York, citing Hale, affirmed that the principles of virtue upheld in that state were essentially Christian, so that to subvert them was to be deprived of the right to free opinion. As usual, it is only Christianity that can be blasphemed, a point that acquired importance in later years. The concern of the nineteenth-century judiciary was obviously public security, and lawyers increasingly made the point that blasphemous writings might provoke discontent among the poor by destroying their faith in an afterlife.

Levy's tone is equable, though he condemns, as David Lawton also does, the traditionally capricious and prejudiced behavior of judges in blasphemy trials. There have been times when it almost looked as if the law was learning to condescend to the notions and the conduct of ordinary folk. Of course we need to remember that it is prone to atavistic relapses. Even so, Levy is right to say that the expansion of freedoms under the First Amendment has virtually abolished the crime of blasphemy in the United States. The Supreme Court has never decided a blasphemy case, but a related charge against a movie in 1928 brought forth Justice Frankfurter's judgment that "blasphemy ... was a chameleon phrase which meant the criticism of whatever the ruling authority of the moment established as orthodox religious opinion." And so one can hope that the arguments now being advanced in Britain for an extension of blasphemy laws to cover religions other than Christianity will not be raised in the United States. Indeed, it seems fairly certain that any conviction for blasphemy in the United States would be overturned by the Supreme Court. As Levy remarks, the Constitution forbids persecution of the blasphemer, however disgusting his remarks. Here we have the most important difference in the current practices of the United States and the United Kingdom: the latter offers the chance of success to those who seek to prosecute, and there are helpful precedents.

Levy is not at all sure that the effects of this American freedom are wholly beneficial—it can be abused by the intemperate—but he must be glad that his country is unlikely to witness anything comparable to the London prosecution in 1976 of *Gay News* for publishing a poem by the homosexual poet James Kirkup about the love of the centurion for the crucified Christ. This prosecution was in the first instance private, the work of a tireless English Comstockian, Mrs. Mary Whitehouse. The judge at the seven-day trial was Jewish, presumably to ensure impartiality, since his own religion was not the one allegedly offended; but he unexpectedly increased the severity of the law by ruling that intention was irrelevant, that you could blaspheme without meaning to blaspheme. The House of Lords has power to change the common law, and after the success of the *Gay News* action some peers tried to do so, but they lost the vote. As Frankfurter perceived, the law remains whatever judges and juries say it is, from case to case.

This is unsatisfactory, but it is a small matter compared with the Rushdie affair, where the argument that religion and the state ought to be kept separate has no immediate relevance, at least in the West. Nor was it a part of the prosecution's case that Rushdie's behavior might lead to public outrage and disturbance, though those have been its consequences; twenty-two people have died, books and bookshops have been burned and bombed and just the other week his Norwegian publisher was shot. There was no trial, there was only a verdict: Rushdie was guilty of writing forbidden words about the Prophet and the Koran, and the sentence, without possibility of appeal or revocation, was death. There was no attempt to consider *The Satanic Verses* as a whole, to allow consideration of its generic characteristics as fiction of a certain sort or of its aesthetic merit. Even one blasphemous sentence would have been enough. Levy shows how the book has been misrepresented, but he does not like *The Satanic Verses*, arguing that Rushdie, reared as a Muslim and with a degree in Islamic studies, should have known what he was doing.

Yet the persecution of the author was started by a dictator in an alien and theocratic state, with indisputably political motives. Rushdie is a citizen of a state that has continued, correctly, to protect him, having also declared that it had no powers to prosecute his book. Churchmen and others have campaigned for new measures to "protect" not Rushdie, but the Muslim minority that wants him dead. It was pointed out that certain forms of speech and writing, say, inflammatory and racist remarks, were already forbidden by law. The question is whether it would be tolerable for a secular state to impose further restrictions on everybody in the interests of its minority populations. For, as Levy says, various faiths are asking, in the name of tolerance, that the power of the state be placed at their disposal; and they would use that power.

It is fortunately very improbable that the English blasphemy law will be extended, and unfortunately it is improbable that it will be repealed. In a society progressively more permissive and less shockable, yet more and more ethnically divided, the religious minorities have the power that arises from understandable resentments; their claims are social and political as well as religious, and these elements are inextricably blended. What they call blasphemy is also seen as social oppression. Some demand to be ruled by their own systems of law, seeking what amounts to a state

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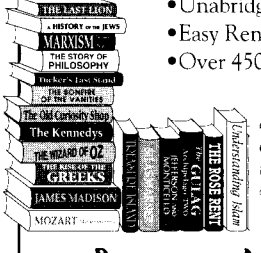

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within the state. Even the relatively inert secular majority can be antagonized by this kind of claim. There is plenty of trouble in store from blasphemy so long as it is available for purposes of political provocation.

Levy's book is the product of more than twenty years of study. David Lawton's book, much shorter but still powerful, is a direct result of the Rushdie affair, and so takes a more focused interest in non-Christian blasphemy, in the idea as it presents itself in varying cultural settings. He ranges over historical instances, many of them also discussed by Levy; and he shares Levy's low opinion of the conduct of judges, and calls the law "a provocateur's charter." He uses a more modish terminology than Levy, but he thinks hard with it. What he calls "the discourse of blasphemy" has wide application, including sedition, apostasy and so on; the Nazis employed it when burning books. The freedom conferred by the First Amendment, he would agree with Levy, is not an unmixed blessing, for it results in violent fundamentalisms even more illiberal and dangerous than blasphemy prosecutions. Moreover—and this is his central point—blasphemy can be the means by which the rights of new communities are affirmed. This is fine in its way, and has a pleasingly reformist sound, but it should be remembered that the reaction to these blasphemous overtures can be equally, and perhaps less winningly, violent.

Lawton accordingly devotes a chapter, long enough to unbalance his book, to showing that the entire work of Freud is a deliberate blasphemy against Christianity, a way of asserting his own Jewishness; but this is en route to a remarkable study of *The Satanic Verses*, a book he regards as "philosophically important." If you consider the whole book, he says, and not just the offending pages, you will see that Mahound is specifically *not* Muhammed, and has this insulting name because he is a deliberate travesty of the Prophet, as the imam's religion is a travesty of Islam. But this argument really has nothing whatever to do with literary or philosophical value, and it is less powerful than the one that Lawson proposes most cogently—that Rushdie really is a blasphemer, and that blasphemy can be "creative and necessary." Of course, Muslims who think Rushdie an apostate from a religion that permits fatwas, and feel themselves tainted by his guilt in naming whores after the wives of the Prophet, will not be thinking in terms of creativity. Nor will it seem self-evident to them that fact and fiction ought to be distinguished.

Lawton's book is a headier read than Levy's (whose earlier work it often cites). Yet taken together these books offer an exhaustive account of a practice that is no longer to be seen as a thing of the past, but as up to date, political and dangerous. And if Lawton is right in saying that freedom of religious opinion leads to aggressive fundamentalisms which are likely in their turn to use blasphemy as an ideological and political weapon, then what we have is a problem that, as the Rushdie case foretold, may turn very nasty indeed.

FRANK KERMODE is the author most recently of *The Uses of Error* (Harvard University Press).

Garden Variety

BY ANNE HOLLANDER

The Culture of Flowers by Jack Goody

(Cambridge University Press, 474 pp., $54.95, $18.95 paper)

It is easy to put flowers into the same group with water and sun and the other things that all humans have to reckon with. We are given to thinking of a flower as one of the universally respected earthly phenomena, the beautiful sign of nature's essential goodness, or perhaps of its artistic superiority. Flowers are thought to have graced the garden of Eden, where God first put his wonderful works at man's disposal; and we can well imagine that all human culture has ever since taken account of their beauty and made something of it, and of them.

But in fact there were no flowers in the garden of Eden, nor in the sum of God's earthly creation as recounted in Genesis. Fruit, trees and herbs are all mentioned, but flowers not at all; and the God of Genesis produced a race of people for whom flowers were never primary, naturally or culturally, nor were they of any importance in their all-important relations with Him. Flowers, it turns out, are not universally interesting, attractive or even noticeable. Sometimes they are irrelevant, and often they are offensive and wicked.

Whenever flowers have taken on serious importance in human life, however, they have been swiftly rescued from brute nature and attentively shaped into complicated cultural phenomena. This happens first by sophisticated horticultural intervention, then by commercialization (often on a large scale), by representation in a host of styles and media, and by symbolization in liturgy and literature. Flowers have been trained to mark crucial links between the living and the dead, between the mortal and the divine, the man and the woman, the virgin and the married. Meanwhile the ordinary wild flower left behind in the tall grass has consistently benefited from retrospective tenderness. In fact, flowers are not flowers, forever pure explosions of natural perfection; and if we think they are, we simply reflect an advanced floral consciousness that has been developing through five millennia of European and Asiatic horticultural history, fostered by art, trade, religion and science. These are what have gone to make both the rose-window and the roadside poppy so breathtaking.

In western and southern Africa, by stark contrast, there has been no culture of flowers, and not many actual ones. In those regions, only people and beasts have had symbolic power and natural beauty. Plants are valued for their bark, their roots, their leaves or their seeds, and all that these may bring or do, or be made to mean or to create, mostly in a dry or otherwise processed state; but the flower is acknowledged only as the fleeting sign of coming crops, a thing without visual or other value for itself alone. African art has ignored flowers to dwell on human and animal forms in multiple shapes; and ritual offerings to god or friend have involved cooked food, not raw vegetation.

Such differences and their meaning and history are explored at length in Jack Goody's dense anthropological inquiry into "the culture of flowers." His scope is global, and his material immense; and one cause of his exhaustiveness is the perpetual need to temper and to qualify all such sweeping descriptions as those that appear above. Studying the use and the meaning of flowers across all of world history, Goody nowhere finds any custom or assumption perfectly stable and absolute. The book serves rather

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as a study in cultural ambivalence, and as a sermon about the right way to view the effects of cultural change and exchange upon firm belief and established practice—or indeed, the effects of the latter on the former. Just by following flower culture, Goody can expound on the fragile nature of what has been taken for granted by one society about others, about its own past, about nature, divinity and ceremony. He is adept at describing simultaneous contrary cultural trends in one place and period—the iconic and the aniconic, for example—and at maintaining our awareness of the uncertain boundary between sacred and secular usage, or of the gap between accepted practice and real popular behavior.

This refreshingly wide anthropological gaze, without special political, artistic or economic emphasis and with no greater interest in either the present or the past, permits an aloof view of convenient oppositions such as East and West, Christian and Muslim, ancient and modern. Flowers have known no such boundaries, traveling from one end of the earth to the other, from one religion to another and from one millennium to the next, changing reputations from sacred to profane and back again within the same society, finding conflicting functions without ever losing their looks or fragrance. We can see how English allows "the flower" or "flowering" of anything to mean its essence or perfection; but we also use "florid" and "flowery" as derogatory terms about English itself.

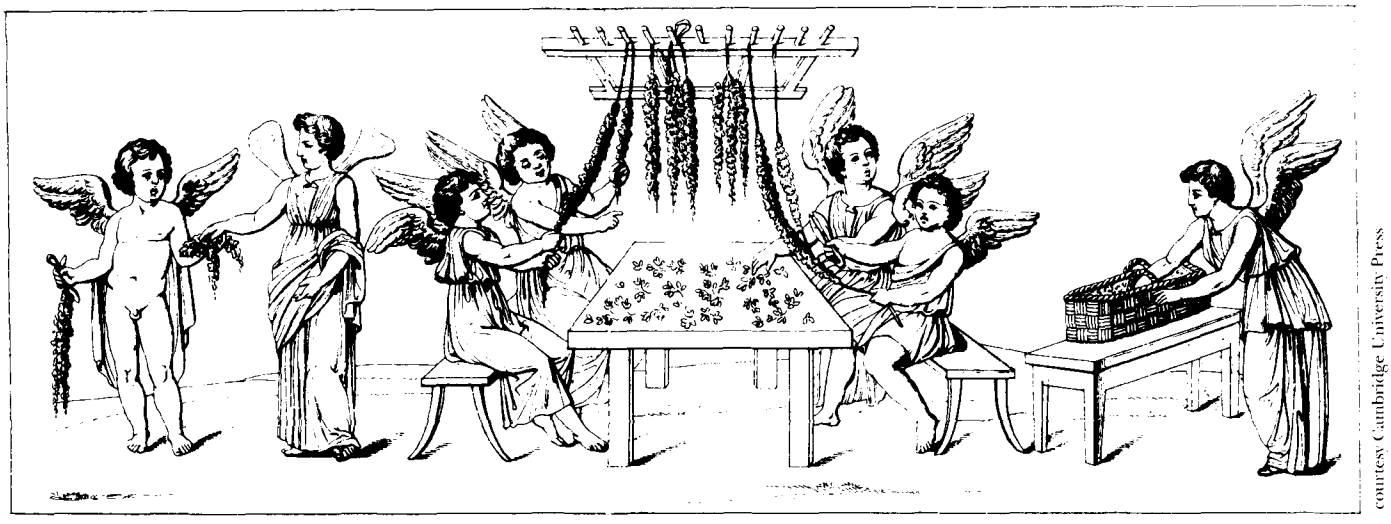
Flowers have been cultivated for display in noble gardens and in urban pots and tubs, but display is only a small part of the culture of flowers—some gardens, like Eden, don't have them at all. In both ancient and modern worlds, flowers have more commonly been raised like crops to be harvested and sold, for use in local worship and festivity, and for export. Thousands were grown and culled to feed the ancient Roman profession of garland-making, and thousands are now beheaded to feed its modern Indian and Balinese counterparts. Meanwhile other flowers have been collected, dissected and classified; crushed, cooked and distilled; extolled, venerated and apostrophized. The same ones have been made to symbolize both the carnal and the spiritual, the emotional and political, the exotic and the intimate.

Similarly, but not always at exactly the same time, representations of flowers have moved all over the world and through time, changing significance with equal freedom, often bringing ornamental blooms where no real examples are, creating visual floral custom where no practical one exists. The sacred lotus, for example, originally a native of China in one form and of Egypt in another, became everywhere familiar on architectural borders, and on vessels and fabrics used by generations of people who might not even recognize a live lotus, let alone think of offering it to a god. Modern women wearing lavishly rose-printed dresses to restaurants do not go there with big garlands of fresh roses on their heads.

Flowers in art have been perfect replicas or schematic diagrams, tremulous with fresh beauty or rigid with hieratic significance; or they have been drained of all meaning, lost in the great Eurasian sea of vegetative pattern. But flowers have also been the subject of exquisitely precise botanical illustrations, accompanied by descriptive and often poetic written material. Goody emphasizes that flower culture has always been closely connected with the graphic impulse. The early development of writing had links with the early development of small-scale flat ornamentation, as well as with the desire to make written classifications of knowledge and then increase their scope. Floral shapes lent themselves to the decorative graphic art carried out on portable surfaces; but flowers also offered themselves as an expansible field of information and understanding that could be promoted in writing, drawing and diagramming.

Before flower culture could spread, it had to begin. Speaking very broadly, Goody shows how floriculture was the offshoot of the advanced agriculture that began in Mesopotamia after 3,000 B.C., which produced the possibility of stratified societies and cultures of luxury. All European and Asian cultures were thereafter developed to permit the deliberate growing of plants for other than immediately practical uses—for pleasure, worship or science. In dry, nonfloral Africa, however, crops were grown by hoe culture, society was not stratified and writing was not used. Cultural transmission was oral and visual expression was three dimensional, so that instead of graphic ornament done with brush or pen, elaborate sculptural and other plastic systems of art and decoration were adopted. Color, so thoroughly explored in the art produced by flower cultures, was carefully limited in African art to a small range of infinitely variable shades of brown, black and white, with some red. These were human, animal and earth colors, naturally more serious than anything offered by flowers, which in any case were not naturally abundant. Famine was a more frequent occurrence than natural floral excess; and Goody sees the absence of floriculture as possibly born of aesthetic discretion as much as of necessity.

China, counting the dry North and the wet South, has always had more native varieties of plant than any country, and without question the most remarkable flower culture. This was not



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CUPIDS AND PSYCHES AS FLOWER DEALERS, FROM A PAINTING AT POMPEII

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one thing for nobles, painters, scholars and scientists and another for ordinary citizens, but a rich continuum linking high and low culture for 3,000 years, fed by interchange with Greece and Rome and the Near East, and eventually by Europe. The art of flower painting was closely linked to calligraphy, and the two were combined in the same compositions; a refined training in both at once was developed for centuries. Poetry, painting and ordinary communicative writing were thus connected and contained in a net of floral assumptions.

Natural scenery and flowers are the most common subjects in Chinese works of art, but many of them represent artificially created gardens, artificially bred plants and artistically created floral arrangements. Thus the continuum between art and nature was also completed, and each was refined to imitate the other. It was in ancient China that heating techniques were first used to force flowers to bloom out of season, and fruit trees were first cultivated to blossom without bearing any fruit. As always, female beauty and all sexuality and pleasure, if not fruitfulness, were bound up in floral reference; ordinary women, ordinary prostitutes, elegant courtesans and court ladies would all be thought to resemble flowers themselves, and would wear them, but some would also be expert at growing them and skilled artists at painting them. Flower painting was a lucrative profession for both sexes, and motifs, styles and technical standards were uniformly refined, whether in the austere art of the educated literati or among artisans serving a popular market.

Once a culture of flowers existed, floral relations between the Near East and the Far East, between Asia and Europe and North Africa, were opened and maintained, largely following the Silk Road. From Persia, roses and jasmine went east to China and west to Greece and Rome, and then to Egypt from Greece; and the lotus went the other way. Flowers painted on paper and glazed pottery, flowers embroidered on textiles or woven into rugs, flowers poetically and clinically described, flowers transmuted into perfumes, unguents and honey, all journeyed around the Mediterranean and across Asia along with seeds, cuttings, bulbs and blossoms.

When flowers began to be cultivated in lands quite distant from their origin, their form and their color were often modified and their meaning changed, so that new floral generations became natives of the new country, with new memories. Thus chrysanthemums, autumnal flowers signifying fertility and longevity in their native China, came to Europe and were used as gifts for the dead on All Souls' Day, with the result that they became associated only with death, and became unsuitable as gifts of esteem or love. Even today French florists often label them "marguerites" so they will sell.

The famous hanging gardens of Babylon, cleverly engineered to overlook the roofs of the palace and the city, had fulfilled the wish of the queen, a Persian princess homesick for the paradise gardens of her own lush country. There, a "paradise" had originally been an enclosed space where various plants, some of them flowers, were grown to be offered to the gods. Such a garden eventually became a retreat for the delight of its owners, a little world of shade and water, color and fragrance, a concentration of earthly pleasure that could even include animals and fish for royal sport. Aristocratic Persian gardens set the standard for the ancient world. The idea was copied in Egypt and China as well as in Babylon and its neighbors, and broadened to include public gardens for the delight of whole cities. Goody demonstrates how closely flower culture has been related to urban culture, where wildness of every kind is processed and transformed, and thereafter more admired in its natural state. He observes, as others have done, that the love of nature is an urban phenomenon, mightily sustained by literary tradition.

Most cultivated flowers have been raised, however, expressly to be sacrificed, not to be enjoyed while they live. Having begun as sacred offerings, sometimes replacing blood sacrifice and sometimes accompanying it, flowers also came to be abundantly grown and reaped for secular pleasure, for social rituals of all kinds, for adornment and for perfume. Following Persia, Assyria and Babylonia, ancient Egypt, China, India, Greece and Rome all developed the use of fresh floral ornament for every purpose. In Rome, no respectable dinner party omitted professionally woven garlands for the heads of guests, for the room and for the vessels on the table. The expense could be heavy and careful planning was necessary; and so a vast flower industry existed to serve such needs, along with the similar ones of civic and religious institutions, to say nothing of imperial ones. The depraved, teenaged Emperor Elagabalus (A.D. 205-222) is reported to have once fatally smothered all his dinner guests in a ton of roses, which had been cunningly arranged to drop down on them from a false ceiling.

Here is where ambivalence comes in. The appurtenances of elegant dinner parties, floral and otherwise, are upper-class luxuries that can be grossly abused; and besides that, the abundant use of flowers in ordinary worship imparts a highly material, sensual and of course wasteful dimension to religious observance. Such facts were periodically remarked upon by thinkers and reformers, often with telling effect, within the ancient societies that raised flower culture to such a high level. Cutting off the flower robs the plant of its fruit. Growing thousands of flowers to be cruelly wasted robs the land of crops that might feed the hungry. In the wake of excesses that incurred not only censure but ridicule, waves of restraint in the use of flowers, along with other fashions for austerity and understatement, became current from time to time in Greece and Rome and ancient China in a way quite familiar to the modern world.

Critical observation about religious use was more profound and long-lasting in its effects. Offering flowers or their perfume to a deity, chiefly by adorning its image with them, can suggest that the god expects a rather primitive level of devotion and invites no active spiritual effort. Contemplation and reflection of a high order must be carried on, therefore, at a distance from religious practice, and the satisfactions of religion must remain quasi-physical. They may reach trance or frenzy, but the human soul can find in them no link to divinity unmediated by sensual devices.

These devices, of course, included the images themselves, along with the perfume and the flowers. In the monotheistic religions that arose after flower culture was established, in Judaism,

Old Men Going to Bed

They have already fallen
Through their first sleep
Somewhere in a room
With a paper or that screen
Whose only door lies open
All night to lead them
Slow-eyed light-footed
To the falling bedside
Quietly hands held out
To fall still farther
Than the stillness following
One rest after another
With knees at their elbows
Turning their clutter down
By the hinges of backbones
Their sockets emptying
To settle with darkness.

DAVID WAGONER

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Christianity and Islam, images were either omitted in observance or perpetually questioned; and at the same time floral garlands were banished from the altars and the heads of the faithful. It was crucial to all these faiths that their adherents distinguish their own practice from that of other religions—those that made no proper distinction between the one Creator and his multiform creatures. Flowers were integral to the rites of the old gods, carefully prepared as sacred trappings for worshipers, sacrificial beasts and idols alike. The custom expressed the ancient idea that gods, beasts and humans, along with divine and human creations such as flowers and images, are joined together inside a vital universe that urges the steady interaction of them all, demanding a perpetual re-creation, through art and ritual, of divine and earthly life, death and rebirth.

Monotheists sought beyond all material cycles for the single, immaterial, ineffable Source. The intense physicality of flowers, the fragrance and visual beauty that promotes their reproductive function in nature, makes them obviously dangerous enemies of the Unseen. Flowers, after all, are noticeable reminders of the way physical attraction works in reproduction, and they have always been associated with the beauty of women, another great enemy of the Unseen. In the orthodoxy of all these religions, women have been required to cover up their beauty, and flowers have had a compromised position, mainly because of their old associations with the disgusting behavior of pagans, gentiles and infidels.

Things were different in Buddhist, Jain and Hindu cultures, where floral custom was never associated with the threat of alien sacrilege, and the web of divine and earthly relations continued to be elaborately woven through floral imagery and usage. There, too, excess brought on self-censure and an austere reaction; but the abiding reliance on a spiritual dimension in physical life has kept flowers important in the religions of China and Japan, India, Pakistan, and Indonesia, from ancient to modern times without interruption. These civilizations also developed poetic and linguistic modes of flower culture to match their sophisticated horticulture and their complex faiths, so that floral metaphors and references proliferated at many levels of thought. The number of actual varieties was broadened as well by constant experiment in breeding and cultivation.

By the time Christianity was officially established, flowers were deliberately absent from its rituals, along with the representations of divinity long since forbidden by Judaism. Images of flowers vanished, too, and in the first ten centuries of Christian Europe the flourishing culture of flowers withered entirely. All advanced horticultural knowledge was lost, along with all the techniques for garland-making and crown-weaving that generations had practiced in the ancient world. Flower crowns in particular were viewed as blasphemous and unacceptable for humble followers of the thorn-crowned Christ.

It is indeed curious how persistently absent a crown of fresh flowers has been in the later history of Western personal adornment, especially for men. Crowns of fresh leaves, though more traditionally permissible, have always been strictly ceremonial and temporary; vegetative crowns were always all right for allegorical or theatrical figures, but they became unbearably ridiculous for ordinary citizens. In Greece and Rome, the making and selling of garlands and flower crowns had been a female occupation, and some flower women were prostitutes, though most were not. Still, the connection was always easy to make, and Goody points out the link, still strong in modern times (especially in the nineteenth century) between the selling of flowers and the selling of sex. Flower-crowned Flora, the Roman goddess of fertility, was identified in the Italian Renaissance with a famous courtesan of that name, and fanciful paintings of that goddess were often portraits of real whores. The revival of antiquity in Italy had even brought real flower crowns temporarily into vogue, along with artificial versions, but only briefly; respectable Western women have since tended to wear floral crowns only if the emphasis is firmly bridal or otherwise virginal, and men have stuck to hats.

Flowers themselves were brought back into official Christian favor in the same way that images were restored, with many heavy references to the need for instructing the illiterate faithful. It was a long, slow process, since recurrent iconoclasm and ecclesiastical reform had a devastating effect on both image and flower: Protestants swept them both from the churches, just as early Christians had done; Jews and Muslims never had either in the sanctuary. Orthodox Christianity, however, managed to get flowers back into the center of religious thought. An important symbolism was eventually created for certain privileged ones, especially roses and lilies, in connection with the purity of the Virgin, the martyrdom of Christ and the mystery of the Incarnation. By retroactive sanctification, all living flowers could then be seen as God's precious gifts with holy lessons to teach. But perhaps only from a safe distance: during the early Middle Ages, floriculture was practiced in monastery gardens, mainly for medicinal use and botanical research. Deliberately decorative, fresh cut flowers kept their questionable associations—luxury, sacrilege, eroticism—and secular flower culture remained primitive.

Some change in emphasis was clearly needed, as Western culture speeded up in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and both antique and Eastern civilizations began to exert a visual and intellectual influence on Europe. Flowers were appearing everywhere on the exquisite textiles and objects designed in the East: Islam, while eschewing flowers in religious practice, nevertheless had a rich secular heritage of their representation in literature and art, and a great garden tradition learned from the Persians. And flowers had figured in the poetry and science of a recently rediscovered antiquity—never mind unholy practices. A permanent if ambiguous place for flowers was slowly being prepared in Western cultural life.

Ancient rural customs had continued, such as gathering wild blossoming branches in the forest every spring, or creating maypoles with wild flowers. And so for urban pleasure, now that hand-wrought garlands were totally discredited, fresh flowers might be tied together in bouquets, as if artlessly plucked from country hedges. Eventually churches, houses and women all might wear cut flowers in bunches; the theme of their natural innocence was built into the spontaneous looking arrangement. Western poetry and other writings made use of bouquet metaphors, the "posy," the "anthology" and the "florilegium"; manuscript illuminations of sacred subjects replaced schematic floral borders with perfect renderings of fresh blooms that looked as if they had just been picked and strewn around the edges of the page. The impulse reached a climax in the fabulous bouquets depicted by the artists of seventeenth-century Holland, where floriculture had finally once again become a huge business and a speculative enterprise, as it still is. The Dutch flower-pictures of the seventeenth century were nevertheless vessels of lingering ambivalence. While the paintings celebrated the breathtaking results of a serious floriculture and the riches of its entrepreneurs, they also illustrated the vanity and the brevity of life, emphasizing the cut flower's all-too-transient freshness, the "flesh is grass" idea; and

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they often included a few vivid flies and worms as emblems and reminders of human mortality. When a flower painter apparently recorded with reverent fidelity the fleeting beauty of God's gifts, moreover, he was often flaunting his own capacity to immortalize their image, showing a mixed bouquet of flowers that actually never bloomed at the same time, and could never pose together in the same vase in real life. Artifice again proved indispensable for the truest rendering of nature.

Bouquets of flowers are nicely detachable ornaments. They may freshen the atmosphere of a sumptuous interior, but they may also stand up in brilliant opposition to an otherwise stark room. Bouquets are portable, and everyone looks wonderful carrying one, because a bouquet looks provisionally festive—a gift just received or soon to be made, never a vain personal adornment, always becoming but never shameful. The bouquet has seemed like the proper dress of Western flowers for a thousand years; it fulfills most emotional requirements in our modern world of dialectic and stress.

On page 284 of Goody's heavy book, there is a footnote:

> *On the advice of the publisher I have* excluded not only sections on rituals of love, but also a chapter entitled "The shapes of flowers" dealing with the different forms in which they are used, a chapter on Japan, a general theoretical chapter and short appendices on "The classification of flowers," "Heraldic flowers," "Artificial flowers," "Flowers in New Guinea" and "Flowers in Polynesia." I mention this only to draw attention to the fact that these topics were not neglected and I may publish on them elsewhere.

Tired readers may feel relieved to find this information. But the vastness of the subject that so weights the present volume has also somewhat misshapen it, and there are things on the list of omissions that might well have displaced some of what's here. Since Goody is largely taking up the role of anthropological historian, he has been careful to demonstrate the difficulty of knowing what people really did in the past: how chronicles can diverge from facts, how strict rules are often broken, how the staunch practices of the main group are greatly modified by some members of it, how people say one thing and do another—so that the texture of the historical sections is thickened by many back-looping amplifications and digressions. As a straight anthropologist, Goody has also wished to include his own direct observations about present floral custom, and we are therefore given long, detailed sections on the current state of flowers in Bali, China and India, as well as a lot about France and America. All of it is fascinating, and I wouldn't really want to be without it; but it is hard to absorb in the same book with the elaborate discussions of early Christian writings, early Chinese art, and Renaissance iconoclasm.

I would rather have had Love, Shapes, Heraldry and Artificial Flowers, and Old Japan to go with Old China, instead of quite so much detail about the present south Chinese New Year; and perhaps less on the Church fathers and fewer repetitious discussions of the questionable role of images and icons in religious observance, or reiterations of the same ideas about ambivalence. If I am to have modern China, then I really miss New Guinea and Polynesia, and I want more on Central America, ancient and modern. There is strikingly little floral reference culled from modern European, English and American literature, or from painting other than the Dutch. I waited in vain for Zola's "Le Ventre de Paris" and for "Le Lys rouge" of Anatole France; I did find Balzac's "Le Lys dans la vallée," but no "Rappacini's Daughter." Goody is not claiming, after all, to be a literary critic or a historian of art.

Still, his book contains enough diverse material, offered with a singularly comprehensive and energetic intelligence, to brighten and to perfume any other realm of cultural study. It has large consciousness-raising power. Once you have read it all, you can never again fail to note the real or figured flowers that spring up at every turn of modern life, and in every corner of the past. It offers the chance to acknowledge, and perhaps to understand, how wrong flowers can seem as well as how welcome, to notice exactly when they signal the banal or serve the devil or figure the sublime, to observe with a wider-open eye both the daisy printed on the paper napkin and the painted lily in the angel's hand.

ANNE HOLLANDER is the author of the forthcoming book *Sex and Suits*, to be published next year by Knopf.

Betrayal

BY ALAIN DE BOTTON

While England Sleeps by David Leavitt

(Viking, 304 pp., $22)

It is ironic, speaking politely, when a book concerned with one concealment turns out to have been based on another concealment. David Leavitt's new novel tackles the theme of suppressed homosexuality in England in the 1930s, but it artfully suppresses the detail that the story has been taken more or less straight from Stephen Spender's autobiography, *World Within World* (a borrowing exposed by Bernard Knox in *The Washington Post*). Such revelations always threaten to render the story of the book more interesting than the story in the book. In this case, the illumination of the novel's origins also serves as a reminder that the evaluation of a historical novel does not in the end depend so much on the extent to which facts (plagiarized or acknowledged) are in evidence, as on the fictional uses to which they are put.

First, the scandal. Leavitt's book is a shameless copy of Spender's story. It is an account of a young left-leaning upper-class Englishman in the 1930s (Brian Botsford for Leavitt, the autobiographical "I" for Spender), who has a relationship (involving full-blown sex for Leavitt, a more delicate "friendship" with "paternalistic feelings" for Spender) with a working-class young man (Edward Phelan for Leavitt, Jimmy Younger for Spender). Edward-Jimmy becomes a Communist, goes to fight the Spanish Civil War, is disgusted by the violence that he witnesses at the battle of Jamara in February 1937 and tries in vain to leave the country. Spender's "I" and Leavitt's Botsford go to Spain to help him out. Spender relates how Jimmy was forced to serve his time in jail before returning home safely. Leavitt (in a rare burst of independence) chooses to have Edward killed in a bout of typhoid off the Liverpool coast.

Leavitt's debt to Spender is at times impressive. Let us imagine that a writer has a character who is fed up with the Spanish Civil War and wants to return to London to get a job. If one is Leavitt in 1993, one makes him say, "Now I want only to go home and live simply with my family, getting a job in a factory or wash-

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ing dishes." Pleasing enough, until another critic in *The Washington Post*, checking things out, reports that Spender had written much the same in 1948: "He wanted to go back to England and be an 'ordinary chap.' He would like to have a job in a factory or bottle washing."

In principle, there is nothing wrong with reheating a piece of history for the purposes of fiction. It has been done before. (Before she was Madame Bovary, Flaubert's heroine had lived in a somewhat different incarnation in a newspaper account of Eugène Delamare, the second wife of a medical officer living in the small town of Ry.) When real life is involved in fiction, it is not so much the revelation of fact that dooms matters as the poverty of the imagination that is making use of it. Any judgment of Leavitt's book should therefore be severe for reasons other than the appropriation of material.

Milan Kundera once made a helpful distinction between two sorts of novels set in the past. There is, on the one hand, "the novel that is the illustration of a historical situation ... popularizations that translate nonnovelistic knowledge into the language of the novel," and on the other hand, novels that deal with "the historical dimension of human existence." In the first case, cardboard cutouts are wheeled out to represent "the bourgeoisie" or "the last throes of imperialism." In the second case, history is only one part of a multifaceted portrayal of characters whose lives are inevitably and decisively, but not reductively, shaped by larger public events.

Leavitt evidently cannot be bothered with even the first, more prosaic task of delineating the public situation. His England at the time of the Spanish Civil War is a land whose population is forever drinking tea and watching the rain fall—much as one might expect a bad novel about France to show us people smoking Gaulloises, eating baguettes and regularly exclaiming, "*Je m'en fou!*" It is impossible to imagine an English narrator writing the following sentence: "Rain thudded against the glass, so much rain that I wondered for a moment if perhaps that was Rupert's problem, if like so many Englishmen he had simply got soggy in the head." Not surprisingly, Leavitt is also enamored of the British-as-sheep trope: "Queues everywhere: if you put a sign on a wall that said, 'Queue here,' they would have lined up in front of it."

British pre-war society, as depicted in the novel, is a pit of cowardly hypocrisy. Leavitt counts on an analogy between civic blindness and sexual evasion to add subtlety to his national portrait: the fascist threat is swept up under the carpet along with what goes on in public lavatories and in the bedrooms of Eton. Yet the parallel between the denial of sexual impulses and the denial of military dangers is disappointingly facile, certainly in the schematic form in which Leavitt inserts it into his novel. At one point the narrator breezily informs us: "The world was ending, but in London women gossiped about royalty and argued over the price of mutton, men drank ale and wanked each other in public loos before going home to eat the mutton their wives had argued over."

Descending from such pronouncements to more specific dramatic situations, Leavitt fares little better. Given the formulaic backdrop of a homophobic and snobbish aristocracy that is riddled with Communists and homosexuals, one counts in vain on Brian's and Edward's story to add some depth. In the time-honored novelistic tradition of the simple but trusting poor boy, Edward becomes devoted to his young lover Botsford, who in turn clings to the idea of homosexuality as something that he will outgrow, moving on to marriage and a family. Leavitt's '90s twist on '30s expectations is predictable; readers of *The Lost Language of Cranes* will recognize the situation of the gay male who refuses to face the big truth, as well as the painful consequences that Leavitt metes out for such refusals.

Playing out the cautionary tale, Leavitt manages to drain it of tension that it might have had. A large part of the problem is that he has Botsford himself tell it. The narrative, which he calls a "frank admission of moral failure," is intended as a form of retrospective confession. And, ironically, it is all too convincing. Rather than leaving the reader condemning Botsford for neglecting Edward or taking up with the flirtatious Phillipa Archibald in her flat off Sloane Square, his confession lets one appreciate why he did everything he did. Edward is undoubtedly sweet, but one recognizes him as a bit too sweet, bound to get on one's nerves at the end of a Sunday afternoon. He is full of diligence and good heart, he reads three books a week to improve himself and he keeps a meticulous diary recording expenditures financial and otherwise.

Leavitt's morality tale is also anachronistic, which is not a small flaw in a historical novel. Though the arguments for coming out of the closet seem self-evident today, the options open to a gay man in pre-war England might actually tempt many to settle down with a girl as sporting as Phillipa Archibald, who, when Botsford shyly confesses an interest in men, dismisses any hint of complication with admirable modernity. "Love occurs between people, not genders," she says. "Why limit ourselves? It's 1936; it's practically the future."

In short, though we feel sorry for poor Edward when he dies of typhoid, having gone off to Spain, heartsick over Botsford's abandonment, we really cannot grow morally outraged at Botsford's so-called "moral failure." It all seems very understandable and beyond condemnation, so that when Botsford torments himself for his behavior, the reader is tempted to reassure him that it really wasn't all his fault, or else to feel that the torment is somehow not quite heartfelt—and not to care too much about that, either.

This lack of pathos is connected to the tone of the narrative, in which one can discern the presence of the great camp English comic writers—Wilde, Wodehouse and Noël Coward. Yet the witticisms are woefully not quite up to their level ("Mr. Botsford, is it true that in 1937 you were a card-carrying member of the Communist Party?" "I never carry cards. One is likely to lose them.") And the plot, constructed with the mechanical neatness of a Wilde comedy—every character is dropped in to reappear at some later and crucial point in the story—seems less artfully balanced than artificially banal. The dandy Rupert Halliwell suddenly shows up in Spain as a somewhat implausible judge for the Republican side, Phillipa's aunt befriends and betrays Edward in the midst of the civil war, his sister just happens to show up at the same opium den as Botsford and so on and so forth. This is all very well in a comedy, but it prevents the story from ever assuming the emotional resonance that the bare facts (poor boy killed for no reason) might deserve.

Leavitt, who cites Jane Austen as one of his favorite authors, has Botsford explain that "as a writer I have always valued the personal over the global, for who, after all, populate our globe but beings who are both ridiculous and beautiful?" As political phenomena go, the allegiance of many young Englishmen to communism and the Republican cause may well beg an explanation more psychological than political. Leavitt's difficulty lies in failing to interest us enough in character to experience the tragedy unfolding in the shadow of ideology. In the end the unfortunate parallels with Spender's life are just more evidence of a writer failing to depict characters who might conceivably have lives of their own.

ALAIN DE BOTTON is the author of *On Love*, just published by Atlantic Monthly Press.

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

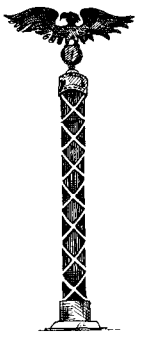
Godlessness

SEVERAL MONTHS AGO I RECEIVED a letter from the Bishop of Durham in England inviting me to participate in a public debate about God and religion. The event was cooked up by the bishop—who, for his quirky reading of scripture, has been labeled "The Blasphemous Bishop" by the British tabloids—together with my godfather, who is an Episcopal minister in Richmond, Virginia, where the discussion was meant to take place. I wrote back to say that God wasn't my line of work: that I did not believe in Him, that I thought the Church had done more harm than good and that, in spite of his obvious virtues, I found a lot in Jesus to dislike. Within a week I had another letter saying that I was just the man for the job. The discussion was to be billed as "The Theologian, the Lay Activist, the Agnostic and the Atheist." The first three slots were filled by the bishop, Mrs. Jack Kemp and an agnostic novelist from North Carolina named John Foster West. My godfather, it seemed, needed an atheist.

MY GODLESS KNACK FOR GETTING out of things I don't want to do somehow wilts beneath the humane radiance of my godfather the minister. He is a profoundly impractical combination of Southern courtliness and clerical kindness—the sort of man who will spend hours waiting for the intersection to clear at a four-way stop sign. Once, after five minutes of waiting for him to stop letting others cut in front of us at an automatic coffee dispenser, I turned to him uncharitably and said, "You know, being you is a real pain in the ass." He laughed and apologized to me as he stepped aside for the man behind us. Such relentless selflessness has its psychic reward, however: I have always sensed that to refuse him anything would be to invite some sort of punishment.

THE FIRST NIGHT'S DISCUSSION was held at his place, The Grace & Holy Trinity Church, where the panelists were fed by ladies in bright yellow smocks that said: "Have You Hugged An Episcopalian Today?" The believers clearly had an overpowering home-field advantage (the bishop was splendidly intimidating in his rich purple shirt and pectoral cross), and it struck me that one of the reasons we atheists have a bad name is that there is no positive culture of atheism: no awesome buildings in which committed atheists congregate, no smocks that ask if you've hugged an atheist today, no bumper stickers to proclaim Atheists Against Hell or Atheism Is For Lovers (even though it's true!). The idea of the Good Atheist is just not very well-established; the closest thing to an atheist archetype is the witty infidel. Atheism, in short, might benefit from a well-constructed public relations campaign.

PERHAPS NOT SURPRISINGLY BOTH nights' discussions were marked by a general uneasiness that anyone would say simply that he did not believe in God. I tried with little success to argue that a moral code rooted in reason was stronger than one rooted in superstition. I failed completely to suggest that atheism does not preclude a rich inner life. The evangelical Mrs. Kemp scored big points with the audience by pitying me: she said that I might have found the Lord if only I had been raised by someone of faith, such as the bishop. Atheists rarely condescend to believers in this way, by suggesting that, had they only been raised by reasonable people, they might see the world as it is—but there you have it. The next night an evangelical female law professor subbing for Mrs. Kemp extended the believers' lead by insisting she would pray for me. The next day the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* described the others as they had described themselves—"theologian," "lay activist," "agnostic," while I was a "self-proclaimed atheist." Is there not in this a hint of atheism-ism?



JOGGING INTO ROCK CREEK PARK the Sunday evening after my return, I passed a hollowed-out man seated on a log beside the sidewalk. He rocked back and forth, muttering what I was sure was a request for money, and so, lacking any, I picked up my pace. For reasons no doubt submerged in a childhood of television addiction, but which I ascribed to a new surge of Christian guilt, I suddenly envisioned the beggar springing to his feet in anger, pulling a firearm from inside his loose-fitting shirt and shooting wildly in the direction of my rapidly fleeing form. The image was so intense that it was all I could do not to look back. The first bullet would graze my shoulder, I felt, which would bleed a great deal, but fail to slow me down. The last five would miss dramatically—ricocheting off dumpsters, splintering tree trunks, spraying hot metal into the cool night air, etc. I should say that running triggers the melodramatist in me. In the course of the average thirty-minute jog I perform several heroic feats and survive many pathetic ordeals.

TWENTY MINUTES LATER I RE-traced my steps out of the park and again approached the beggar. This time, however, he was stretched out on the hard dirt between the street and the sidewalk, naked from the waist up. Two police cars, a fire truck and an ambulance flashed in the street. The man's blood stained his trousers and pooled on the curb. His throat appeared to have been slit, though it was hard to see through the small cluster of men in uniforms around him. I stopped and watched stupidly as they wrapped a towel around his neck, covered his face with a plastic sheet, strapped him onto a stretcher and rolled him slowly into the back of the ambulance. "But I saw him sitting there alive twenty minutes ago," I said to one of the policemen, who clearly regarded both my presence and my questions as a code violation. All he would say was that he had absolutely no idea what had happened. Then he and the others climbed into their cars and left.

AMONG THE DISHONEST SENTIments I occasionally detect in myself, and so take personally in others, is the desire for emotional proximity to someone else's tragedy. When Pan Am's Flight 103 went down with its cargo of financiers, for example, the world's trading floors came alive with people laying claim to the victims. Fashionable tragedies involving famous people with many casual acquaintances offer the largest windfalls of counterfeit emotion: if a widely despised television journalist were to be killed in Bosnia, the lamentations of those who did not know him or did not like him would drown out all genuine suffering. This sort of synthetic grief has nothing to do with real grief. Its frisson is much closer in spirit to the thrill of momentary celebrity.

SO I AM AWARE OF THE PERILS OF associating myself with the man with the slit throat. But I could not help but wonder: Had he been asking me for help? The next morning I searched the newspapers. No murders, suicides or traffic accidents fit the description. Jogging back down to the spot, I found on the sidewalk, partly obscured by fallen leaves, a small puddle of his blood still wet and sticky. For such moments the atheist is poorly equipped. But then, if he's honest, so too is the theist.

MICHAEL LEWIS

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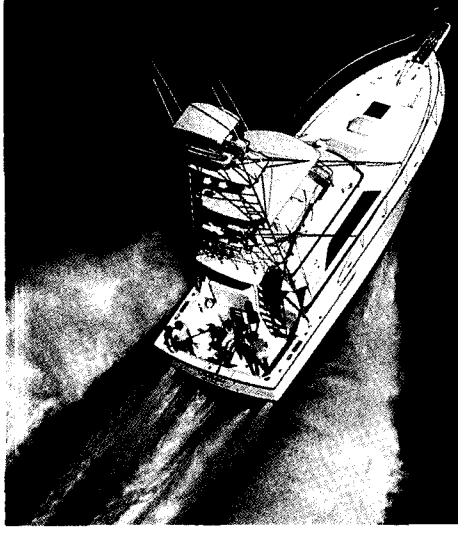
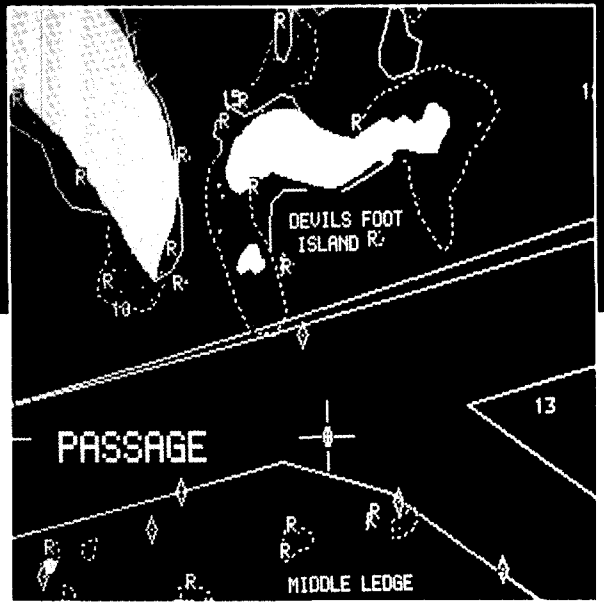
The challenge:

TO STEER CLEAR OF THOUSANDS OF NAVIGATIONAL HAZARDS IN OUR COASTAL WATERS.





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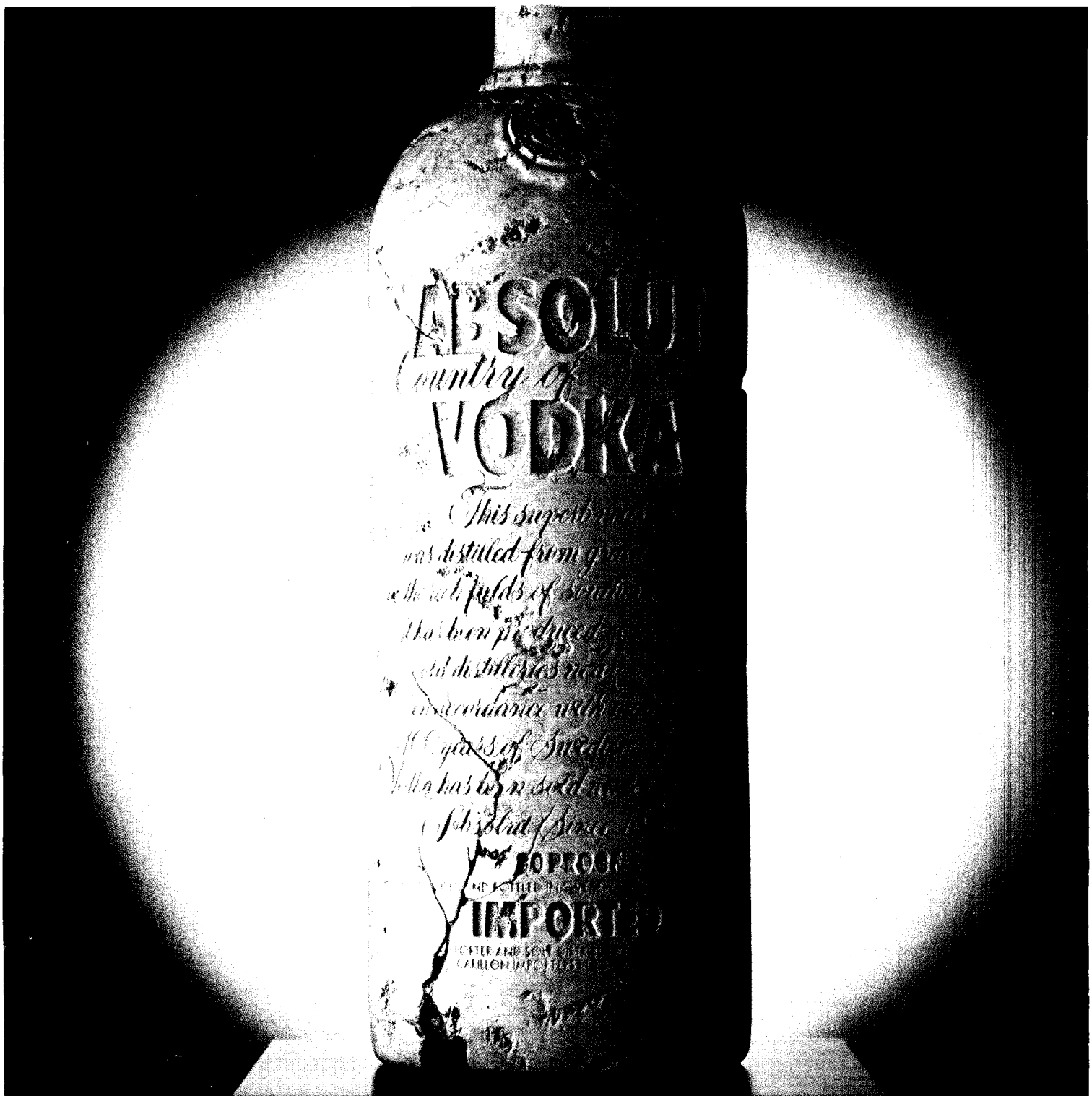

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